

Chronic Back Pain

I had been to three different physicians. The car accident in 1990 had left me with terrible back pain. The only option offered to me was prescription medication. For three years I lived with chronic pain - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The prescription drugs helped relieve some of the discomfort, but I had to stop taking them when I began getting sick to my stomach – which was often worse than the pain itself. Time and again I thought, “This can’t be the only choice. There must be another alternative.” It wasn’t until 3 years later that I heard about magnetic therapy from a friend, and decided to try it. With nothing to lose, I used a magnetic pad on my back during the day and slept on a magnetic mattress pad every night. Much to my surprise, after two weeks my back felt much better. After a few months, the pain was completely gone! My wife, who had a back problem caused by herniated disks, woke up every morning with pain and stiffness. Not long after sleeping on the magnetic pad, the stiffness began to subside, and she was soon waking up pain-free as well. Although skeptical at first, I was amazed at the effectiveness of magnetic therapy, and began to intensely investigate the field of biomagnetics. Since my initial experience, I have had the pleasure of helping many people achieve similar results, enhancing the quality of life of those suffering from chronic conditions and injuries. Now I’d like to take the opportunity to help those of you who may be suffering from chronic back pain, and to tell you how to better prevent it.

Back pain is the number one form of pain experienced by people in the U.S. It accounts for 20% of all injuries and illnesses in the workplace, and is responsible for as much as \$50 billion in diagnosis and treatment each year¹. The National Institutes of Health estimate that 4 out of 5 Americans will experience back pain at some point in their lives. Not a pretty picture from any standpoint. The majority of back pain occurs in the lumbar region of the spine². Here, most of your body’s weight is placed on the lowest 5 of the 24 vertebrae (bones) that make up the spine. Considering all the other muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, disks, and major nerves that are also a part of or connected to the spine, it’s no surprise that there are so many ways to injure your back as you twist and bend them³. Pain is considered chronic if it’s recurring, lasts more than three months, and can seemingly be stimulated by any small movement (for whatever reason)⁴. In the 21st century, we’re finally realizing that drugs and surgery are not always the answer for treating chronic pain or other musculoskeletal conditions & injuries. The future lies in an integrative approach to promoting the body’s own healing ability by using noninvasive, safer treatments. Acupuncture, massage therapy, chiropractic and osteopathic care, and certain physical therapy exercises are just a few options to help with back pain. Following an individualistic approach to treatment is key. A particular therapy that may work for one person may not work as well for another. Often it’s necessary to try a combination of treatment methods to begin feeling significant improvements. For true recovery of back injuries and disease, pain and inflammation need to be reduced, proper function and strength restored, and further injury prevented⁴. With this in mind, let’s discuss how magnetic therapy can help. One of the primary benefits of magnetic therapy is the reduction of inflammation. Localized inflammation following an injury is a natural protective reaction. It creates an imbalance in sodium and potassium ion (charged particle) concentrations at a cellular level. As a result, fluid accumulates in the cells, causing the injured tissue to become inflamed. (Think of it as retaining water after eating salty food.) If there’s no intervention, the body will eventually heal itself and the inflammation will subside. However, this process can be very slow and painful. Because of this, treatments that can safely speed the overall process are needed, particularly in the case of chronic conditions like arthritis. Applying a bio-north magnetic field safely rebalances electrochemical ion concentrations. Excess fluids and toxins are flushed from the cells and removed through the lymphatic system. As a result, healing time is often reduced by as much as 50%. Since major nerve bundles run through the spine, it’s obvious why back pain is so common. Pain is caused by an electrochemical signal sent to the brain. The normal electric potential of a neuron (nerve cell) is around 70mV when in a resting state. When injured, a neuron’s charge becomes positive due to a shift in chemical ion balances. This triggers a pain signal to be sent to the brain. Applying a bio-north (negative polarity) magnetic field lowers a neuron’s electric potential, bringing it closer to its normal, negative state. As a result, the pain signal diminishes faster, and in most cases, will eventually stop. Another important goal when recovering from back injuries is restoring mobility. Magnetic therapy helps relax muscle tissue, thereby increasing flexibility and reducing the incidence of muscle spasms. About four years ago, researchers in Italy tested the effects of a magnetic seating system on several volunteers. Each person participated by either driving or remaining seated at a computer workstation for prolonged periods, both with and without the magnetic system. “The results showed a decreased myoelectric (neuron) activity both at shoulder and lumbar level by using the magnet based sitting system for prolonged seated work tasks... The system appears to be an effective tool in preventing muscle contractures secondary to prolonged, constrained positions”⁵. Because it can be so difficult and painful to move, many people feel they need to rest for a few days after injuring their back. But did you know that bed rest should really be minimized or avoided? According to David Lehrman, M.D. (chief of orthopedic surgery at St. Francis Hospital and founder of the Lehrman Back Center in Miami, FL), “for every week of bed rest, it takes two weeks to rehabilitate”³. A 1995 study in Helsinki, Finland found that out of 186 subjects, those who went about their daily activities as tolerated had greater flexibility and less pain than those who underwent backmobilizing exercises. The “slowest” recovery was seen in subjects that were prescribed two days of bed rest⁶. While an interesting fact, it’s one that some of us may grumble about. Bear in mind we still have to sleep and give our bodies a chance to heal and recuperate. As I found out years ago, sleeping on the proper magnetic mattress pad will help speed the healing process and can significantly reduce chronic pain over time. Back in 1990, a 12-month clinical test on the effects of magnetic mattress pads was conducted in Tokyo, Japan. The study, led by Dr. Kazuo Shimodaira, involved 431 subjects. 375 of them received full-sized magnetic pads and the remaining subjects received sham mattress pads for control. (Each magnetic pad contained 124 permanent ferrite magnets with field strengths of 750-950 Gauss.) Here are the results of the yearlong test: On average, 53.3% of the subjects realized the effect of the magnetic mattress pad within 3 days, and over 70% within 5 days. What’s more is that thorough testing for side effects was conducted and none were found⁷. (Note: The magnetic mattress pads used in this study did not produce very strong magnetic fields. As stronger magnetic fields are more effective, a higher energy pad would improve results even further.) Supporting these findings, a 1997 Johns Hopkins pain center treatment study compared magnetic therapy for

chronic pain with a placebo therapy. It concluded that people using the magnetic therapy showed a dramatic improvement, whereas the placebo group improved only minimally. Again, there were no side effects detected. Since the vast majority of adults are not in "ideal" physical condition, the risk of back injury for them is greatly increased. If you're out of shape and are planning an activity that requires lifting, bending or twisting, it's a good idea to take steps that can help prevent injury in the first place. Magnetic therapy is an excellent way of accomplishing this. There are three primary actions that take place when using magnetic therapy for prevention. The first two are its ability to increase circulation and to relax muscles. The effects are similar to warming up and stretching before a strenuous workout. It's really the third action that sets magnetic therapy apart from anything else though. Magnetic therapy can effectively control energy flow along the body's acupuncture meridians (energy channels). Placing a magnetic pad or support over an area channels the body's energy directly to that location. Increased energy availability, combined with improved circulation, significantly extends the amount of time that one can exert themselves before muscle fatigue sets in. In turn, this reduces the likelihood of muscle strain. The combination of improving blood flow, relieving muscle tension, and reducing pain makes magnetic therapy ideal for treating back conditions and preventing further injury. While effective on its own, magnetic therapy is also an excellent adjunct to other treatments. Whether chiropractic, acupuncture, therapeutic massage, or another method, it can help improve and prolong a treatment's positive results. The next time you're out and about, make use of a high-energy magnetic support or back pad. It's a simple and effective way to continue through the day with less pain and a greater range of motion. Trust me. Your back will thank you!

SOURCES:1 Centers for Disease Control – National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, June 19, 1999.2 Pain Central: What Causes Back Pain?3 Pain Foundation: Back Pain4 National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: Low Back Pain Fact Sheet5 PubMed: Efficacy of a chair with magnets in the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders caused by prolonged sitting.6 PubMed: The treatment of acute low back pain - bed rest, exercises, or ordinary activity?7 Summary of a 12month double-blind, clinical test of magnetic mattress pads. Kazuo Shimodaira, M.D. Tokyo Communications and Kouseikai Suzuki Hospitals, Tokyo, Japan. 1990.8 "Use of magnetic therapy for chronic pain" by Joseph Kandel, M.D. and David B. Sudderth, M.D. The Arthritis Solution.

TIPS & GUIDELINES FOR A HEALTHIER BACK

The National Institutes of Health provides guidelines for maintaining a healthier back. Following these and a few other tips will greatly increase your chances of preventing further injury while strengthening your back muscles.

When Standing:

- Keep your weight balanced on your feet. Your back supports weight most easily when curvature is reduced.
- Don't slouch when standing or sitting. (Keep your hands lightly clasped behind your lower back. This improves posture for your neck, shoulders and upper back, and reduces muscle tension.)
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.

When sitting:

- Make sure your work surface is at a comfortable height for you.
- Sit in a chair with good lumbar support and proper position/height for the task. (Use a pillow, rolled towel, or lumbar cushion if needed.)
- Switch sitting positions often and periodically take a short walk or light stretch to relieve tension and restore blood circulation.
- If you must sit for a long period of time, rest your feet on a low stool or a stack of books.

When lifting:

- Don't try to lift objects too heavy for you!
- Pull in your stomach muscles, keep your head down and in line with your straight back, and lift with your legs.
- Keep the object close to your body.
- Do not twist when lifting.
- Do not carry an object in one hand if it causes you to lean to one side. (Use both hands, or carry an additional item to balance the load.)

Exercise:

- Always warm-up and stretch before exercise or other strenuous activity.
- Following a prolonged period of inactivity, begin a program of regular low-impact exercises. (Ask a physician or orthopedist for recommended exercises appropriate for your age and requirements.)
- Speed walking, swimming, or stationary bike riding for 30 minutes a day can increase muscle strength and flexibility.
- Yoga or Tai Chi can help stretch and strengthen muscles, and improve posture.

Everyday habits:

- Maintain proper nutrition and diet to reduce and prevent excessive weight (especially around the waist area).
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking reduces blood flow to the lower spine and causes spinal disks to degenerate.

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About the Author

A resource for child and adult psychotherapists using play therapy, sandplay, art and sandtray therapy. Includes bibliography, Forum for consultation.

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