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TALKING BACK

THE NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO HEALTHY BACKS

Winter's here again! Have fun, stay fit.

For many of us, the first sign of frost means our favourite winter activities are just around the corner. It also means icy steps and sidewalks, snow to shovel and finding the best ways to stay warm. Whether you're an outdoor type or you'd rather spend your spare time curled up in front of the fire, there are a few simple things you can do to help stay healthy and injury-free this winter. That's what this issue of *Talking Back* is all about. Read on for tips on winter sports, handling snow, and keeping fit during the long winter months.

Whether you're a snowboarder, skier, snowmobiler, jogger or skater, you need to know how to take care of your back in winter conditions. Otherwise, the sudden twists and bumps from winter sports can sideline you with painful muscle strains and tears.

Some winter sports, like snowmobiling, skiing, tobogganing, and snowboarding, can be especially hard on your back. Check with your chiropractor before starting any new winter sport.

- **Always warm up.** Start by stretching your muscles at home. Focus on the lower back and leg muscles, such as hamstrings and calf muscles. When you arrive at your sporting destination, warm up again. Your chiropractor or fitness professional can advise you on the best stretches for your favourite sports, but here are some examples:
 - **Skating:** Do some lunges. Take a good-sized forward step with your right foot, and let your left knee sink toward the floor. Keep your shoulders aligned over your hips. Repeat 5 to 10 times, and then do it all over again with the left foot.
 - **Skiing:** Do 10 to 15 squats once you're at the ski hill. Place your legs shoulder-width apart, align your knees above your feet and lower your buttocks slowly. Straighten up slowly and repeat.
 - **Tobogganing:** Do some knee-to-chest stretches while sitting or lying on your back. Pull your knees to your chest and hold for 30 seconds. This helps your spine be as flexible as possible as you bounce through the snow.
 - **Use the right safety equipment.** This means helmets, face guards, and protective clothing. Make sure that your equipment is in good condition, and fits properly. Shop at a reputable outdoor or sporting goods store, and have someone there adjust and fit your equipment to your size and shape.

...continued inside

Dear Doctor

ASK A CHIROPRACTOR

Dear Doctor: I'm in the market for a new mattress and pillow, and there are so many options. How do I know which is best?

Dear Patient: The quality of your mattress and pillow is key to getting a good night's sleep. Look for a mattress that is both comfortable and supportive for your back. The current trend is toward "selective support" which means that you can put weight on one area of the mattress without affecting the rest of it. In other words, your restless bedmate can toss and turn, and you won't notice a thing! A mattress should also be flexible enough to adapt to your body's shape, while providing firm support.

There are no hard and fast rules for which type of mattress is best for you (foam, coil spring, waterbed, futon, etc.) That's why you need to test it out in the store. Lie down on it. Bounce and roll around a bit. Just sitting on it won't give you a real idea of how it feels.

If you're sharing a bed, choose a mattress that is big enough to easily accommodate both of you. A narrow mattress means awkward sleeping positions, which can lead to a sore back and a bad night's rest. So give yourself and your relationship a break. Have plenty of space.

Check that the mattress is covered and finished on both sides so you can rotate it and flip it over every few months to even out the dips or wear spots and maximize support. Alternate between a clockwise rotation and an upside-down flip.

When buying a pillow, choose one that provides proper support. It should be firm enough to keep your head and neck level with your mid and lower spine when you're lying on your side. It should also keep your head and neck level with your upper back and spine when you lie on your back. Avoid pillows that are so thick or thin that they angle your head and neck away from your body.

Why so much fuss over a simple mattress and pillow? The right bedding can help you get a good night's sleep (which is important to your overall health), and prevent a stiff and sore neck or back. A good mattress and pillow can make all the difference. Your whole body will thank you for it.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT SLEEPING



Placing a pillow beneath or between the knees can help keep your spine aligned.

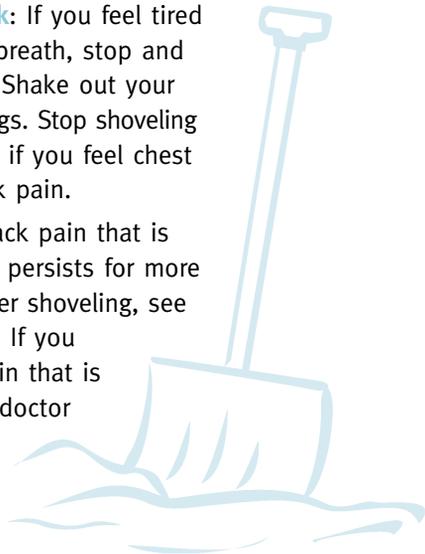
We spend about a third of our lives sleeping, so having the right mattress and pillow is essential. Your sleeping position can also make a huge difference in the quality of your rest. It's best to sleep on your back or side, never on your stomach. Lying on your back or side allows your head, neck and spine to relax into their natural alignment. This reduces interference with the nerves, and helps your body rejuvenate itself, leaving you feeling rested and refreshed in the morning.

Practice Safe Snow Removal

When you consider that a shovelful of snow weighs 5 to 7 pounds, you realize how much weight you have to lift to clear your sidewalk or driveway – on average, several hundred pounds! Shoveling snow can be a pain in more ways than one. These tips will help keep your back in top shape:

- **Don't let the snow pile up:** If the weather report calls for several days of snow, frequent shoveling will allow you to move smaller amounts of snow at once. It's far less strenuous in the long run.
- **Pick the right shovel:** Use a lightweight pusher-type shovel. If you are using a metal shovel, spray it with Teflon first, so snow won't stick to it.
- **Push, don't throw:** Always *push* the snow to the side rather than throw it. That way you avoid lifting heavy shovelfuls of snow, and sudden twisting or turning movements.
- **Bend your knees:** As with any heavy object, you need to use your knees, and leg and arm muscles to do the pushing and lifting, while keeping your back straight.
- **Take a break:** If you feel tired or short of breath, stop and take a rest. Shake out your arms and legs. Stop shoveling immediately if you feel chest pain or back pain.

If you have back pain that is severe or that persists for more than a day after shoveling, see a chiropractor. If you have chest pain that is severe, see a doctor immediately.



Winter again! Have fun, stay fit.

(cont'd. from cover)

On the slopes, make sure that ski and snowboard bindings are adjusted for your height and weight. Always check the weather conditions and watch the trails for icy patches and other potential hazards.

Dress for the weather. Layered clothing works better to keep your muscles warm and your skin dry so you don't get chilled. You may want to invest in clothing designed specifically for winter outdoor activity (available at your local outdoor or sporting goods store), or layer garments made of natural fibres (like cotton, wool and silk).

Know when to rest. Rest when you feel tired. Stop your activity immediately if you experience sudden or prolonged pain in any joint or muscle. Cool down by stretching, and change into dry, warm clothes.

Stay hydrated. Don't be fooled by the temperature! Your active body needs plenty of fluids even though it's cold outside. Be sure to drink lots of water or juice before, during and after winter sports.

Follow these tips, and you're well on your way to having a safe and healthy winter.



10 TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BACK HEALTHY.

- 1 Exercise regularly.
- 2 Follow a healthy diet.
- 3 Maintain good posture.
- 4 Stretch your spine before and after sports.
- 5 Don't overload your backpack or shoulder bag.
- 6 Stretch your legs and back after each hour of sitting.
- 7 Never cradle the phone between your neck and shoulder.
- 8 Sleep on your back or side, not on your stomach.
- 9 Invest in a good chair, pillow and mattress. It's worth it!
- 10 Have regular spinal check-ups.

What to Know about Whiplash

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE WHIPLASH?

It can take from several hours to several days to feel the symptoms, which can include neck pain, headaches, nausea, dizziness, and ringing in the ears. Usually people who have suffered whiplash complain of a stiff, sore neck. They may also experience back, shoulder or arm pain and stiffness. Some people will feel fine after the accident, but wake up the next day with symptoms. In some cases, it can take weeks and even months for the full extent of the injury to become evident.

Each year, at least one of every thousand Canadians suffers a whiplash injury. You likely know someone who has been “rear-ended” and ends up with a stiff, sore neck – or maybe it’s happened to you.

Whiplash happens when the head and neck are subjected to forces that cause a rapid movement known as “acceleration/deceleration”. The movement can cause the head to move front to back (in a front-on or rear-end car crash) or side-to-side (if your car was hit from the side), resulting in injury to the vertebrae of the neck, and the muscles and ligaments that support them. It doesn’t take a high-speed crash to cause whiplash. It’s the quick, often unexpected movement, which pushes the head beyond its normal range of motion, that causes the injury. Other causes of whiplash injuries include sports, slips and falls, and even activities like amusement park rides that can cause a rapid and excessive whip-like movement of the neck and head.

The good news is...

Most people who have auto accidents don’t end up with whiplash symptoms. Of those who do have symptoms, most recover completely within three to six months. About 20 percent of people with whiplash injury experience long-term pain and other problems. A small portion may suffer severe, chronic pain. The remaining 80 percent of people are symptom-free after a year.

And there’s more good news. Chiropractic can help.

Research has shown that chiropractic treatment can help speed recovery from whiplash. Chiropractic can help relieve pain and restore correct movement to the head, neck and back, as well as the arms and shoulders. In order to make a diagnosis and recommend the most effective treatment, a chiropractor will want to know all about the incident that caused the whiplash: what position the person was in (e.g., sitting straight, or leaning over); whether or not the person was using a seat belt or headrest, and so on. This helps him or her understand the movement of the head, and the possible impact on the vertebrae and soft tissue. In some cases, x-ray or other tests may be used to help determine the presence and severity of certain injuries.



Toll free: 1-877-DC's-CARE (327-2273)

www.chiropractic.on.ca

TREATMENT THAT STANDS UP.