

Ten steps to a healthy back

1. **Always bend at the knees.** Most of us are now aware of this golden rule and we usually apply it when lifting heavy weights. However, remember to bend at the knees even when you are going to pick up a light object.
2. **Avoid bending and twisting at the same time.** This puts a huge stress through the low back. Just about every domestic chore involves bending, together with some degree of twisting; sweeping, vacuuming, emptying the washing-machine etc, so proceed with caution.
3. **Try to carry things close to your body.** This keeps the weight near your centre of gravity and so reduces the stress through your muscles and joints.
4. **Avoid carrying loads on one side.** Try to wear a backpack, rather than having a bag slung lazily on one shoulder.
5. **Good posture** is essential if you want to maintain good spinal health. Most of us have a tendency to slouch or perhaps collapse to one side. Try to stay comfortably up-right and square-on to your work.
6. **Use a chair that fits you:** your feet should rest on the floor or on a foot-rest and your back should be supported by the back of the seat.
7. **Keep moving.** A fixed position for any length of time is bad news. Try to change what you're doing every 15 to 20 minutes. If you've been sitting, stand up, and if you've been standing then walk about a little – anything, just move.
8. **Exercise.** This is not only good for your heart and lungs, but also your back. Walking, swimming, keep-fit, martial arts, whatever appeals, but do it regularly.
9. **Make sure your bed is up to the job.** Modern beds are generally pretty good, but do check that your mattress is still giving you reasonable support at night.
10. **Use the help that is available.** We are blessed in this area with a number of osteopaths, physiotherapists, chiropractors and doctors all available to treat your back and to pass on advice. Use us!

Andrew Peters, Osteopath