

Caring for children

Looking after young children involves lifting, carrying and stooping over beds. Pay special attention to the way you lift and watch for unexpected problems such as children who struggle against being picked up.

Children are not the sole cause of back trouble, but they certainly constitute a risk, especially for women – it takes up to five months for the ligaments of the spine and pelvis to tighten up again after the birth. So if you are a new mother, you will be particularly vulnerable to developing back strain from weak and overstretched stomach muscles, poor posture or faulting lifting.

Choose a cot with a side that can be lowered right down since this saves you bending over in an awkward position to pick up your baby. Whenever



Washing and changing a baby
You can do these jobs on a work surface a little below elbow level, such as a chest of drawers. Or you can kneel on the floor and change your baby on a low bed or sofa.

you can, carry your baby in a special baby carrier on your back to distribute his weight close to your centre of gravity. Slings worn at the front tend to slacken and impose a strain similar to that of pregnancy, except the baby is heavier now.

Lifting a child

When you lift a child, follow the basic rules of lifting: squat down by the child and use your leg muscles to rise up again, keeping your back straight as you stand up.

Squatting down

Before you pick up your child, squat down with one foot firmly on the floor. Keeping your back straight, lift your child with both hands under her shoulders.



Standing up

As you stand up, let your strong leg muscles bear the load.



Sports

It is difficult to identify which sports are more likely to expose you to the risk of back problems. However, certain movements or activities may aggravate existing problems. If you are prone to recurrent backache, be alert for sharp twinges or an intermittent ache. When you notice them, avoid sports such as golf or football, which involves vigorous twisting, turning or bending, and redouble your preventative exercises.

Warming up and cooling down

You must always warm up before any sport: cycle for five to ten minutes on an exercise machine, jog on the spot for a similar period or follow the “patter” routine – keep your toes on the ground and lift the heels alternately as rapidly as possible, raising your knees a little each time. Once your pulse rate increases a little, perform muscle-stretching exercises appropriate to your sport for another five or ten minutes. After vigorous exercise you should cool down, repeating the stretches you did at the start.

High-risk sports

You can reduce the risk of injuring your spine in certain sports if you keep particular muscle groups in good trim. Golfers need good muscular support, particularly from the muscles which run down and across the abdomen. Serving in tennis or badminton and bowling in cricket can stress the facet joints in the lower spine. To avoid problems, try muscle-strengthening exercises (*see p. 124*).

Long-distance running stresses the lower body's joints. Regular stretching of hamstrings and lower back muscles helps avoid problems. Check, too, on the angle of your pelvic tilt (*see p. 141*), wear well-padded running shoes and, as you run, avoid swinging your arms across your front too much.

General fitness

Fitness is important for everyone, not only for people who play sport. If you are fit, then a good, relaxed posture probably comes naturally. If you have recurring back pain caused by poor posture, take up exercises to make you fit, once an episode of acute pain has died down. You will then be less likely to injure yourself; and if you do, the damage will probably be less severe, and your general fitness will help you recover more quickly.



Warming up

Before doing any sport it is essential that you spend time doing exercises to warm yourself up.