

## The Cumulative Nature of Back Injuries

The word cumulative means something that develops, or increases gradually over time. This term applies in a variety of different situations, including the development of heart disease or tooth decay. Such is the case with the majority of back disorders.

The negative thing about cumulative disorders is that they happen so gradually that people are unaware of the consequences until it is too late. The positive thing about cumulative disorders is that there is time for prevention.

Knowing how to take care of the back begins with understanding what puts it at risk.

The risk factors for back disorder include:

- Poor posture.
- Poor material handling.
- Smoking.
- Loss of flexibility, strength, and endurance.
- Stress.
- Prolonged exposure to vibration.

It is not one instance of poor posture or poor material handling, but rather an accumulation of these items over time that can lead to a back disorder.

Like heart disease and tooth decay, many back problems take months or years to develop and may not signal that a problem is developing until it is too late. It is not possible to do everything perfectly. The goal is to evaluate the risk factors and minimize their impact. Even a slight reduction in the accumulation of risk factors can contribute to a healthier back.



# CUMULATIVE NATURE OF BACK INJURIES

## Talking Notes

### POINTS TO REVIEW

**1. How we use our bodies everyday affects how fast we wear out the parts.**

Our bodies wear out as we age, this is a natural process and we can't stop it. We can speed it up or slow it down depending on how we use our bodies. The more things we do wrong, the faster the process, but small, positive changes can add up to help slow it down.

**2. Back injuries develop over time. We don't know there is a problem until it is too late.**

People don't generally experience a back injury from one lift. The lift may have been the event but the event occurred because of wear and tear over years of misuse. Our body isn't designed to tell us that we are developing a problem; it is designed to tell us that the problem exists.

**3. The shape our back is in today is a result of habits—good or bad.**

We grew up believing that we are indestructible because our bodies tolerated a great deal of demands when we were young. This created habits of using our bodies in demanding ways. As our bodies age, the effects of these years are adding up. Changing habits now, or at least starting to change them will help to undo some of the damage.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. What are some of the risk factors for back problems?**
- 2. Do you have to totally eliminate all risk factors to have a healthy back?**
- 3. How close are you to experiencing a back problem?**
- 4. Name three changes you can make today to decrease the chances of a back disorder?**

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