

The 3 things you need to know about your back

1. Persistent stiffness – even if you have no pain – can lead to disc degeneration and disc bulges

Your discs should work like shock absorbers. They should be nice and thick. When they are thicker and more hydrated this prevents you from overloading the joints of the spine.

When you wake up you are 2cm taller than you will be by the time you go to bed in the evening. It is normal to lose fluid from the discs during the day as a result of movements such as lifting, pushing, pulling, carrying and sitting.

If your spine isn't stiff and it has moved well during the day, then when you go to bed that night your discs will refill and be nice and juicy and thick again in the morning. This is part of the normal metabolic process that your spine goes through every day.

Stiffness interrupts this process.

Over time if your back stays stiff for long enough – even if you don't have pain – your discs will start to get thinner and thinner because they are not able to refill and thicken back up overnight.

As your disc thins it's a little bit like a car tyre going flat – you start to see bulges in the rim. There is also more pressure on the joints in the spine as the disc thins and the space between each vertebrae gets smaller. Both of these issues can cause back pain.

2. Your alignment can impact how well your core is working

Your alignment is really important for a variety of reasons.

One of the most common ways we see your alignment impacting your body and contributing to back pain is that it impacts how your muscles turn on. Your core muscles can be completely blocked from turning on by poor alignment of your rib cage. You can also find that alignment issues like twists in the pelvis can stop one side of your core switching on as effectively as the other.

If your core is only working well on one side, or not at all, it makes it very difficult for it to help stabilise and support your spine and other joints while you go about your day or exercise.



3. You can lose one third of your multifidus muscle bulk within 1 week of a bad episode of back pain

We all know someone who's had their back "go" on them. Unfortunately many of us have experienced it too. When this happens for the first time your multifidus (a muscle in your back) wastes away. You lose up to one third of that muscle within one week of your back going!

This is a small muscle but it's a very important muscle. It's part of your core muscles and it should contract with your deep abdominals and work with your pelvic floor to help you stabilise your joints. Your core is much more than just your tummy muscles.

The multifidus stops you from pinching your disc when you come back up into standing after you were bending down to tie your shoe laces for example. It also stops the vertebrae from shearing forwards if you have disc issues. So hopefully you can see that it's a bit of a problem if this muscle just disappears by one third!

The tricky thing is that often people are in acute pain for a few days when they feel their back "go" and then once that has resolved they think there is no more issue. If you don't see a great physio to help you get your multifidus muscle back in action then you can be left with a deficit in your back and in your core system.

The good news is there are a few simple things you can start doing to help yourself right away.

- 1.** If you sit all day at work ask if there's anyone in the office who can check your chair and table set up. If not get one of your work mates to take some photos of you sitting at your desk so when you come in to see us we can make some suggestions that will help. Ideally side on views from different angles are the best.
- 2.** Check out our YouTube channel for some instructions for how you could do sitting stretches that will help your back. Please make sure you follow the instructions and if you feel anything other than what is described that you cease the exercise. YouTube channel: Sydney Advanced Physiotherapy – Lindfield
- 3.** Use a hot pack. If your muscles are too tight or in spasm, a hot pack is a great way to get them to back off. If you're not sure if you should be using heat please drop us a line and let us know what's going on and we'll do our best to help you out.
- 4.** Seek out expert help.

The spine is a very complicated structure and it's important that if you get back pain you seek the guidance of an expert physiotherapist like those at Sydney Advanced Physiotherapy.

If you would like help getting immediate relief from back pain, or to resolve an ongoing back problem, then give us a call on 9416 4410 or use our online booking options via our website www.sydneyadvancedphysio.com.au.
