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# 10 TIPS FOR RELIEF FROM BACK PAIN AND STIFFNESS

A RECIPE TO BETTER BACK  
HEALTH WITHOUT  
PAINKILLERS,  
INJECTIONS, OR SURGERY



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# Content Compiled by Joel J. Digris, PT



Joel J. Digris received his Master of Science degree in Physical Therapy from Arcadia University in 1997. Joel was born and raised in Schuylkill County, and is blessed with a beautiful wife and four beautiful daughters. As a physical therapist, Joel works with people to help them regain the joy in life that is missing due to pain, weakness, dizziness, falls. As a business owner, Joel has an immeasurable desire to excel in serving the community and the patients of [Achieva Rehab](#).

Thank you for reading our report. I sincerely hope this is a good start to bringing back the joy into your life. Developing trust with your healthcare team is important. Because of this, I want to continue to send you information that we feel can guide you to improved function as you go forward and how a qualified physical therapist can help fast track that process. Please never hesitate to contact me...I am on duty 24/7.

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## BACK PAIN



### TOP TEN TIPS TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST PAIN

Mary Ann Wilmarth, DPT, a spokeswoman for the American Physical Therapy Association and chief of physical therapy at Harvard University, says it is critical that people address any back pain or injury right away. “Early intervention can help prevent a chronic problem from developing and obviate the need for medication and surgery,” she says. Here are 10 ways to help alleviate back pain:

#### Tip #1: Avoid Prolonged Sitting

Your body was NOT designed to sit all day. **Slouching** increases the forces transmitted through your low back TENFOLD.

**Less sitting** = 10 times less force on your painful back.

Because most of us slouch when we sit, the muscles that support our spine (“core muscles”) are very weak, making it even harder to support our backs. **Limit sitting to 20 minutes** at a time (then take a break by standing or walking).

When you do have to sit, be sure to sit upright, preferably with your back supported by a chair.



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#### Tip #2: Check Your Footwear

Sandals, flip-flops, high-heels and hard-bottom shoes are all proven to **ADD pressure** and stress on your spine.

Wearing comfortable, cushioned shoes can decrease the force through your low back by 20-25%.

Imagine how you would feel with **25 times less stress on your back**? Remember that poor footwear choices has a cumulative effect. Pressure builds up over years eventually causing a weak and stiff back around **age 40**. To decrease stress on your back, be sure to wear comfortable, cushioned shoes that do not have heels

#### Tip #3: Bending With Your Knees

Most people bend over with their back and forget to bend their knees and hips. When you bend with your back, you place a lot of **stress on your low back**...even more than when you're sitting and slouching in a chair! To take the pressure off your back, be sure to bend with your knees. If you need to get something off the floor, bend with you hips and keep your back straight, head up, and stick your buttocks backwards (just like performing a squat).



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#### Tip #4: Check Your Sleep Position

This tip typically gets the **QUICKEST** results. We spend anywhere from 6-8 hours in bed every night. It's important to keep your spine supported to decrease stress and pain.

The best way to support your back while sleeping is by using pillows. If you are a **BACK SLEEPER**: add a pillow under your knees. If you are a **SIDE SLEEPER**: add pillows between knees **AND** ankles.

Note: Avoid sleeping on your stomach. This position will wreak havoc on your spine and shoulders. It puts all of the joints in poor positions! Even if this position doesn't hurt now, you are setting yourself up for pain and spinal deterioration In the future.



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#### Tip #5: Work On Your Abs

Having a six pack does not mean you have the abdominal muscles needed to support your back.

In fact, even the US Army is phasing out sit-ups because they increase the risk of back injury. So how do you get strong abs? Try **planks**. To safely strengthen your abdominal muscles, do planks, making sure your back is flat and buttocks down. If you haven't done a full plank in a while, start with your knees on the ground.

#### Tip #6: Check Your Mattress

You spend a third of your life in your bed. Using an old mattress can put a lot of stress on your spine. When was the last time you bought a new mattress?

Without knowing more about you, it's hard to recommend a specific mattress. However, if your mattress is older than 5 years, it may be time to make a change.

Invest in a mattress that is comfortable for your spine. Change your mattress out every 5-10 years.



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#### Tip #7: Stay Hydrated

One of the biggest mistakes that could be contributing to your pain and zapping your energy is being dehydrated. Dehydration can cause muscle aches, pains, fatigue, and dizziness.

Try to drink water throughout the day. Avoid excess caffeine, including coffee, tea, alcohol, and energy drinks as these will dehydrate your body even more.

#### Tip #8: Use Ice And Heat

This may be the question we get the most. Do I use ice or heat? **Heat is best in for loosening up stiff muscles and joints.** A lot of people find it useful in the morning when they're stiff and having trouble moving. **Ice is good after activity or in the evening when your back is aching or painful.**

Without knowing your personal situation, the best advice I can give you is to try both ice and heat and keep using the one that makes you feel better!



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#### Tip #9: Avoid Carrying Things On One Side

Whether it's a work bag, purse, or shopping bag, you should switch which shoulder is doing all the work. Another thing to make sure of it to always wear backpacks on both shoulders.

If you carry your bag on the same side every day, not only may be you muscle tension but you could end up causing a small curve in your spine.

#### Tip #10: Consult A Back Pain Expert

The fastest way to take care of your back pain is by going to see a physical therapist. A **physical therapist** can listen to your story and take a look at your back and find out why you are having pain and stiffness. Then a physical therapist can come up with a plan to relax your aching muscles, loosen your stiff joints, and strengthen your body so you can get back to the activities you love.

If you combine all these tips from this special guide with a visit to a movement based physical therapist at Achieva Rehabilitation, then you will see a dramatic drop in your back pain and stiffness.



## BACK PAIN



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