

September 2008

Help! My Back Hurts Whenever I Travel



People who travel have discovered through painful experience that the spine was not designed for long hours of sitting. Too often, the hours spent in a plane or car can result in an aching back the next day. But there are steps you can take before, during and after travel to reduce back pain.

First, travel light. It is better to take two small suitcases, weighing no more than 20 pounds each, instead of one large one. Invest in a neck or lumbar roll to support your spine and keep it from twisting into unnatural positions. And ask us about exercises you can do in public while traveling.

During your travel, break lifting into several stages, and never lift and pivot at the same time. If you have forgotten a support pillow, make one from a rolled-up sweatshirt, towel or blanket. A lumbar roll should be large enough to comfortably fill in the space between the small of your back and the seat. While waiting in line or sitting, perform the exercises we have suggested, and every 20 to 30 minutes, get up and walk around. Pay attention to your posture, too, to keep the back correctly aligned.

At the end of the trip, perform stretching exercises before grabbing your bag off the baggage carousel or unloading the car. Sudden lifting after inactivity can cause back injury. Then, when you get to your room, lie face down on the floor with a pillow under your chest for a few minutes. This will extend your back and help counteract pressures from sitting. A large plastic bag takes up no space in your luggage and can be filled with ice and wrapped in a towel to make an ice pack if your back hurts.

Simple precautions before, during and after your trip can prevent travel aches and pains that can ruin your vacation. We can give you specific exercises that will make your travel experience more comfortable and more pleasurable.

September 2008

Avoiding Boredom on a Stationary Bike



Because exercising indoors on a stationary bike can be boring, many users find that time goes more quickly when they are being entertained. In fact, the more exciting the workout, the higher the motivation will be for the workout.

The easiest and cheapest option is to place your bike in front of the television where you can watch the news or your favorite soap opera or show. Or you might invest in DVDs of faraway destinations specially designed for at-home bikers, from beginner to advanced, to simulate traveling down the *rues* of Paris or the back roads of California wine country. If you prefer to read, place a book or magazine on the front of the bike. Music can be a motivator, as well. Turn on the stereo or an MP3 player to immerse yourself in your favorite tunes as you pedal. The more upbeat the rhythm, the more vigorous your workout can be.

The type of bike you select can alleviate boredom, too. For example, programmable models enable you to simulate riding on flat terrain for a few minutes, then on rolling hills, up a mountain and finally, a cooldown. And if you love video games, at least one bike model lets you use your riding, instead of a hand-held controller, to direct the on-screen action of more than 40 different racing games.

Other options include alternating the bike with other aerobic equipment. During a half hour session, spend equal time on a rower, an elliptical trainer and a bike, or ride the bike at the beginning and end of your workout session, with weight-training exercises in between. Joining forces with a buddy and being accountable to each other for your progress works, too, no matter what your equipment of choice.

Finally, use your ride time to relax. Focus on letting your everyday cares float away and replace them with positive, rejuvenating sensations, thoughts or images.

Whatever method you choose to relieve exercise boredom, research shows that people who do so tend to work out for longer periods. Supplementing the convenience of a stationary bike with these suggestions will keep your workout exciting, entertaining and fun.

September 2008

Regaining Strength After a Rotator Cuff Repair



Whether you have had arthroscopic surgery (the least invasive kind), mini-open or open surgery to repair a rotator cuff tear, it takes at least four to six months to regain much of your strength and range of motion (ROM). Recovering well, however, is as important as recovering quickly.

Therapy after rotator cuff repair proceeds in stages and involves physical therapy. In the first few days after surgery, we will encourage you to move your shoulder through a passive process (passive ROM), and sometimes a continuous passive ROM machine may be used to initiate movement. This minimizes the formation of scar tissue (which can limit motion and thus cause stiffness) while better preparing the shoulder for the strengthening exercises

that follow. Your doctor may recommend medications to relieve pain and inflammation so you can exercise in comfort.

During the next four to six weeks, while you continue a routine of passive ROM exercises, you will also limit the use of your shoulder and keep your arm in a sling most of the time to promote proper healing. Beginning about six weeks after surgery, new exercises will build your strength progressively and increase ROM even further. You typically will be able to drive at this time. At around three months after surgery, we will challenge you again with new exercises to build even greater muscle strength. At that point you should be able to lift something heavier than a cup of coffee. By four to six months after surgery, your healing will be close to complete, but with ongoing physical therapy, you may notice that improvements continue for another half year beyond that.

Returning to normal life after rotator cuff repair surgery is a gradual process. We can design a program of exercises to improve flexibility and strength in the surgically repaired shoulder to enable you to engage in sports and other activities and minimize the likelihood of reinjury to the rotator cuff.

September 2008

Foot Pain in Dress Shoes



Have you ever had a long-anticipated night on the town spoiled by sore feet? The source of your discomfort just might be those pretty shoes you have chosen to wear.

Women's dress shoes are often narrower and less cushioned than shoes worn day-to-day, which may make them uncomfortably confining. And women, young and old, have four times as many foot problems as men, with high heels often being the cause.

Another cause of discomfort could be that you are buying shoes based on your history, assuming that the "right size" for you has remained the same over the years.

In fact, as we age, our shoe size tends to increase, in length, width or both. This flattening of the feet is actually the result of decreased elasticity in the tendons and ligaments that support the foot.

Other age-related changes and conditions contribute to foot pain. Fatty pads on soles and heels break down, resulting in the loss of natural cushioning. Thinner skin and more brittle toenails, also common as feet age, are other foot pain culprits. So are bunions, corns, calluses and ingrown toenails.

Choosing comfort over fashion is a good practice when selecting dress shoes. To ensure a comfortable fit,

- **have both feet measured every time you buy shoes;**
- **try on shoes late in the day, when feet are largest;**
- **walk around the store in the shoes to be sure they are a good fit;** and
- **do not buy shoes that are too tight, too small or uncomfortable in any way.**

Poorly fitting shoes can lead to serious foot problems, and out-of-shape calf muscles wreak havoc on the plantar fascia and bunions. See us for basic stretching and weight-bearing exercises to prevent muscle and bone loss, and improve circulation. This, along with shoes that fit, will make that night on the town something to look forward to.

September 2008

Does Wearing a Knee Brace Help?



As the largest joint in the body and because of its exposed position, the knee is especially vulnerable to injury during sports activities. **Knee braces**, rigid or semirigid orthopedic appliances worn to support painful or injured knees, have garnered recent attention as preventive and therapeutic components in the treatment of sports injuries.

Braces are made from a variety of materials, including metal, foam, plastic, elastic and straps. The types of braces fall into four categories:

- **prophylactic**, which protects knees from injuries;
- **functional**, which supports already injured knees;
- **rehabilitative**, which limits harmful movement while a knee is healing from an injury or surgery; and
- **patellofemoral**, which helps kneecaps move smoothly.

Different knee problems require different braces. Some knee braces can be used instead of surgery to help torn knee ligaments heal. Another type of brace is used for pain that does not improve with strengthening and flexibility exercises, or you may need a brace following knee surgery.

You may purchase simple knee sleeves or supports at pharmacies and medical supply stores, or you may order knee braces from the manufacturers or suppliers on the Internet. Knee braces are available in presized or custom models, which may affect the cost.

When putting on a knee brace, be sure the hinges are placed where the knee bends. Fasten any straps or tapes around your leg, and check the brace during activity to make sure that it has not moved. A poorly positioned brace can hurt rather than help you.

Because knee braces can be damaged through use, you should inspect your brace often for wear and tear, replacing it when it is worn out. Braces made of more durable materials may cost more but might last longer.

While they are considered useful in the treatment of knee injuries, knee braces are the least important part of preventing knee injuries or getting better after an injury. We can design a series of exercises to stretch and strengthen, and to improve your technique to maximize your rehabilitation or prevent injuries.