

# The Spine Column

A Special Newsletter  
for MVP Members



# Easing Back Into Your Daily Activities

Bed rest of more than a couple of days can actually make your low back pain worse and lead to other problems such as stiff joints and muscle weakness. If you do use bed rest for a short time, remember the following guidelines.

- Sitting up in bed puts additional pressure on the intervertebral discs. Lying on your side puts a little more pressure on the discs than lying on your back.
- Trying to eat a meal in bed can be awkward and can put more strain on your back than if you get up and eat at a table.

**Avoid activities that make your pain worse. Modify activities that you cannot avoid doing. Here are some tips:**

- Place one foot on a stool when standing for an activity such as brushing your teeth.
- When putting on pants or stockings, stand with your back against a wall. Then slide your shoulders down the wall as you bend your knees. Gently step into your pants or stockings, one leg at a time.

Return to your normal activity gradually but as soon as possible. Start with walking 10–20 minutes every two to three hours.



## Exercises to Reduce Pain

- Low back pain is very common among adults and is often caused by overuse and muscle strain or injury. Treatment can help you stay as active as possible. And it will help you understand that some continued or repeated back pain is not surprising or dangerous.
- Most low back pain can get better if you stay active, avoid positions and activities that may increase or cause back pain, use ice, and take nonprescription pain relievers when you need them.
- When you no longer have acute pain, you may be ready for gentle strengthening exercises for your stomach, back, and legs, and perhaps for some stretching exercises. Exercise may not only help decrease low back

pain, but it may also help you recover faster, prevent re-injury to your back, and reduce the risk of disability from back pain.

- Exercises to reduce low back pain are not complicated and can be done at home without any special equipment.
- It's important that you don't let fear of pain keep you from trying gentle activity. You should try to be active soon after noticing pain, and gradually increase your activity level. Too little activity can lead to loss of flexibility, strength, and endurance, and then to more pain.

### How do I exercise to reduce low back pain?

Most people who have back pain naturally feel better



### **MVP has online resources available 24 hours a day to help you take charge of your health.**

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by doing certain motions. Some feel better sitting (their back and hips are flexed). Others feel better standing (back and hips are extended). Exercise that moves you toward your more comfortable position is usually more successful in treating your back pain.<sup>1</sup> For example, if you are more comfortable sitting down, exercises that bend you forward—such as partial sit-ups (curl-ups) and knee-to-chest exercises—may help you.

Talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program, and **only do exercises that do not increase your symptoms.**

The most effective exercise programs for chronic low back pain are designed specifically for you and are supervised.<sup>2</sup> For example, a physical therapist might teach you an exercise program that you can use at home. Then you would see the therapist every so often to check on your progress and advance your program.

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- Talk to your doctor or physical therapist if you are unsure how to do these exercises or if you feel any pain when you are doing the exercises.
- Try to exercise a little bit every day.
  - Get some type of aerobic exercise, such as walking, every day. Even a couple of minutes will be helpful, and you can gradually increase your time.
  - Choose a couple of stretching and strengthening exercises that you enjoy doing, or vary them from day to day.

Ask your doctor or physical therapist whether there are additional exercises that will work best for you.

<sup>1</sup> Long A, et al. (2004). Does it matter which exercise? *Spine*, 29(23): 2593–2602.

<sup>2</sup> Hayden JA, et al. (2005). Systematic review: Strategies for using exercise therapy to improve outcomes in chronic low back pain. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 142(9): 776–785.

MVP Health Care offers a condition health management program for members living with chronic back pain. For more information or to see if you qualify, call **1-866-942-7966**. MVP's program is based on the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement's (ICSI) health care guidelines for the treatment of adult low back pain.

Information in this newsletter does not constitute medical advice. If you have questions about your health, talk to your doctor.

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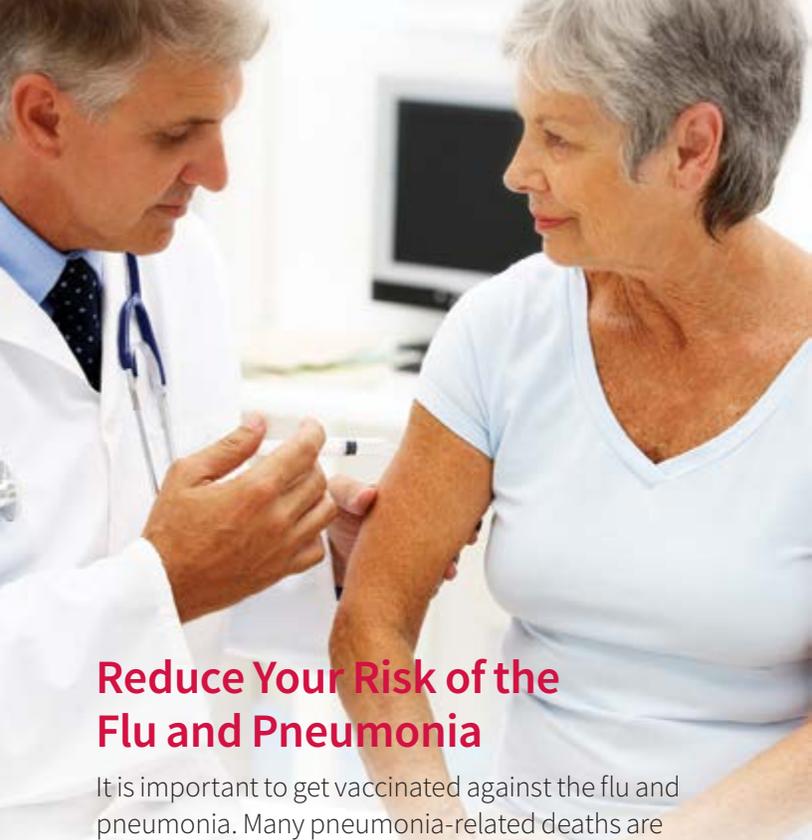
## Contact Us

For more information, call **1-866-942-7966**  
Monday–Friday, 8:30 am–5:00 pm.

TTY: **1-800-662-1220**

### We value your opinion.

Please fill out a brief, anonymous survey at **mvplistsens.com**. We will use this information to create a better experience for all of our members. All responses are 100 percent confidential. The survey only takes a few minutes to complete.



## Reduce Your Risk of the Flu and Pneumonia

It is important to get vaccinated against the flu and pneumonia. Many pneumonia-related deaths are preventable through vaccination and appropriate treatment. Pneumonia is a lung infection that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages. Signs of it include: coughing, fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, rapid breathing or shortness of breath, chills, or chest pain.

### Certain people are more likely to become ill with pneumonia:

- Adults 65 years of age or older.
- Children younger than five years of age.
- People under the age of 65 who have underlying medical conditions (like diabetes or HIV/AIDS).
- People 19–64 who smoke cigarettes or have asthma.

There are several strategies for preventing pneumonia and other respiratory infections such as colds and the flu:

- Wash your hands regularly.
- Clean hard surfaces that are touched often (like doorknobs and countertops).
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow or sleeve.
- Limit your exposure to cigarette smoke.
- Take steps to treat, control and prevent conditions like diabetes and HIV/AIDS.

Get vaccinated. In the United States, several vaccines prevent infections that can cause pneumonia, including Pneumococcal, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), Pertussis (whooping cough) and seasonal influenza (flu) vaccines. Talk to your health care provider for more information on these vaccines.



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