

# **The Many Paths to Healing** **From the practitioners of Sutter Center for Integrative** **Health**

## **Tips For Back-Healthy Exercising This Summer**

By Rich Naval, D.C.

Summer sun is back in Davis, so it's the perfect time for exercise. Exercise is an excellent strategy in the management and prevention of back pain. The theoretical benefits of aerobic exercise are many: It may reduce obesity, an established risk factor for low-back pain; increase endorphins (the body's natural pain killers); and alter the perception of pain, perhaps by reducing anxiety and depression. Whether you're a top-notch triathlete, a weekend Nautilus warrior, young or seasoned, if you are going to exercise, you can stay in tip-top condition, and keep your back strong and healthy, by keeping in mind some simple suggestions.

### **Exercise Scientifically:**

As more and more scientific research proves the benefits of regular rigorous exercise, legions of fitness enthusiasts throughout the world embrace their favorite workout routines. The best workout programs include aerobic training, flexibility exercises, and strength training to balance elasticity and strength. Amateur and professional athletes, coaches, and trainers all over the world have had success by following some universal training guidelines. The universal guidelines are; keep your workouts specific and focused, plan the intensity of your workouts, don't over do it, when you are injured take time to heal, but don't take too much time off (more than a few weeks) or you will lose your conditioning advantage.

### **Do Not Neglect Aerobic Fitness:**

What is aerobic? Any exercise that increases your body's use of oxygen. Aerobic workouts can condition your heart and lungs, firm your muscles, and improve your circulation.

Anyone can follow a program of aerobic exercise. Walking, swimming, or biking are popular forms, and are excellent choices in that these do not subject the back to repeated ballistic forces or place the spine in positions of strain. Walking, for example, promotes the balanced strengthening of lumbar flexors and extensors, as well as its aerobic benefits.

### **Warm-up and Cool-down:**

Whether you are an amateur beginner or seasoned athlete, in order to help decrease the chances of any injury, always include a warm-up and cool-down period. A typical workout routine should include **warming up**, stretching out, flexing, conditioning, strengthening and **cooling down**. When you warm up, do so gradually before stretching out. And, you should incorporate a cooling down period after your exercise routine.

### **Do Not Forget the Water:**

After the air you breathe, water is the second most important substance that your body needs to survive, and without it you will perish in about three days. Dehydration can disable an athlete more quickly than any other nutritional factor.

You can prevent most heat-related problems by maintaining a healthy fluid balance: drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise. Don't rely on your thirst level to let you know when to drink because exercise dulls the sensation for thirst, and by the time thirst is present, the body has already suffered a slight level of dehydration.

The old adage about drinking eight glasses of water a day holds true for a non-exercising adult. If you are working out, increase your fluid intake according to the intensity of your work out, and according to your environment, with further increases for heat and wind. Try not to drink an enormous amount of water at one sitting, and keep in mind that cooler water is absorbed more quickly.

### **Listen to Your Body:**

When you start to feel overheated stop exercising. When a specific motion or routine causes pain, stop and modify your routine. Pain is your body's signal to stop. Listen to your body and differentiate bad pain from good pain.

### **Some Chiropractic Tips:**

Chiropractic care balances the spinal column and relieves mechanical and structural stress on the nervous system. Sports injuries nearly always jar and misalign the spinal column. In fact, almost all trauma to the body affects the spinal column because the spine is at the center of the body.

Modern treatment for back pain, including chiropractic care, favors an approach that is conservative but active and aims both at restoring function quickly and preventing future episodes. While physical therapy, manipulation, and/or medication may be called for, the central element is exercise.

For most patients, I prescribe a lumbar (low back) stabilization program: a set of exercises that aim to normalize the balance of strength between back flexors and extensors, without putting the spine in positions that may increase pain or make the injury worse. Flexion is helpful for many patients, including those with osteoarthritis of the lower spine, or in cases of lumbar strain/sprain when

extension is painful. Flexion exercises are not recommended for patients who have significant problems with their disks.

Inactivity, rather than giving the back the opportunity to heal, leads to a loss of strength and endurance in the supporting lumbar musculature, thus promoting dysfunction and making injury more likely. Individuals with persistent low-back pain tend to be those who restrict their general activities, and are thus prone to suffer a decline in aerobic fitness. This in itself may put them at risk for their recurring problems.

Thus anyone who exercises or plays any sport is a candidate for chiropractic spinal checkups to ensure that his/her spine is balanced and free from structural stress and misaligned vertebrae that may cause "pinched nerves." If you think about normal checkups with your dentist, normal checkups from your chiropractor make sense. There is no question that an athlete performs better when the spinal column is balanced. That is why there are many amateur and professional athletes who wouldn't dream of entering competition without a chiropractic spinal check up.

Lastly, if you want to get back into shape the healthiest way, make sure to utilize various forms of healthcare. For instance, massage for sore muscles, herbs for summer allergies, supplements to help with muscle and general health, homeopathy to help with multiple symptoms, medical clearance for certain exercises, and emotional/spiritual health should not be over-looked. These are all part of taking care of your health while exercising. We all benefit from freedom to choose amongst the different healing arts. I wish you good health.

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