



## **FIRST AID FOR BACKS**

### **Resting**

Resting your back means putting it in a position of comfort. This can be done sitting, standing or lying. Lying down improperly can be painful and not restful. Use good judgment. Be aware of proper body mechanics to pace yourself as you recover and get stronger. With or without surgery, most back pain can be controlled and even prevented by position. Most episodes of back pain resolve quickly with proper techniques and care. During the acute stage, back pain responds well to rest, ice, proper positioning and possibly medications as indicated by your physician.

Follow these instructions and guidelines to aid in the healing progress. Note: If you have any new symptoms such as numbness, tingling, weakness, or loss of bowel and/or bladder control please contact your physician's office immediately. When you have acute pain, it is time to rest; not for weeks, but for a couple of days at the most. Become pain-free and stay pain-free. Listen to your body and it will tell you what to do. If you are hurting and you know that lying down for 30 minutes will relieve the pain, then do so. Remember to exercise painlessly while in bed so that you don't become too weak or stiff. If pain requires you to go to bed for a day, then the time to rest and pace your activities appropriately will help your back heal sooner.

### **Ice Massage**

Ice may be helpful in reducing pain and inflammation. The most effective way is to have your back massaged with ice. You can do this by freezing water in a paper or Styrofoam cup. Position yourself on your stomach, with a pillow underneath your abdomen and hips, or on your side with a pillow between your knees. The area to be massaged encompasses the muscles of the low back and the upper portion of the buttocks. To massage with ice, apply a constant, smooth, steady contact. As the ice melts, peel the sides of the cup and continue. This process takes about ten minutes. Do not massage ice directly over incision.

### **Ice Pack**

You may place crushed ice in a plastic bag or use a package of frozen peas. Dampen a cloth with warm water. Position yourself on your stomach using a pillow, or lie on your side. Place the dampened cloth over your low back and apply the frozen food package. Keep the ice on for 15-20 minutes. When you are through, return the ice/package to the freezer. (Do not eat these after thawing!) Icing can be done three to four times a day for the first two to three days. If you have been given the okay to proceed with exercises, do those which you have found to be helpful.



## **Positioning**

- In the acute stage, it is best to position yourself in a neutral, pain-free position. The following are examples of positions which might help you.
- Lie on your side placing a pillow between your legs and a small, rolled-up towel or pillow under your waist. A pillow under your neck may also be helpful.
- Lie on your back with your knees elevated either by pillows or by a chair. Place the pillow under your neck and a rolled up towel/lumbar roll under your back if you need it.

***Note:*** *When acute, you may feel the need or want to change your position every 15 to 30 minutes. You will find that the log-rolling technique is helpful by keeping your hips and shoulders in line as you reposition yourself.*

## **Medication**

If you have taken aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medication with good results, then consult with your physician's office regarding their usage now. Most people can take two aspirin four times a day safely. However, if you experience any ringing in your ears or stomach discomfort, discontinue the aspirin. Note: Do not take aspirin if you have any history of ulcers. Tylenol is not an anti-inflammatory and, therefore, will not help decrease the inflammatory process.

Avoid or wean yourself from pain medication as soon as possible. Pain medication can affect your body's natural ability to cope with pain and often increases depression associated with chronic pain syndrome.

## **Responsibility**

You can become pain-free and stay pain-free! Caring for your back is your responsibility. When you are acute, you need to use abdominal bracing and avoid activities which flare you again. Practice finding and maintaining your neutral position. Do those exercises which you are able to do pain-free. Take walks two to three times a day, maintaining your neutral position. "Let pain be your guide" to how much and what you do.



Don't overreact to pain and let it stop rehabilitation. A little pain while doing a beneficial activity will usually go away soon after stopping the activity. If pain lingers for several hours, you need to change the way you are doing the activity.

### **Time to Call Your Physician**

Direct all questions and concerns to your primary physician's office. We encourage you to call the nurse anytime you need to discuss your activity level or other concerns related to surgery. He/she is in close contact with our surgeon. In addition, the following situations may necessitate contacting the nurse or, if unavailable, your physician's office.

- Pain persisting for more than two days requiring bed rest.
- New pain, new weakness, or new numbness which persists.
- Unexplained fever, headaches or general lethargy.
- Difficulty controlling urination or bowel movements.
- Increased redness, swelling or drainage from incision.

### **In Conclusion**

We hope that the information contained in this handbook has been helpful to you.