

XVII. THIS is causing your Sciatica/Back Pain! How to Stop

What is causing the pain in your back, buttock, thighs, calves, or feet? What is the movement, position, injury, or thing causing the pain to occur? We refer to the cause of your sciatica/back pain as a “pain maker”.

Your job will be to figure out what the pain makers are in your life. We will show you how to avoid them. We estimate your pain levels can improve by 50% or more just by eliminating the pain makers in your world.

Common pain makers for back pain and sciatica:

Most cases of sciatica are caused by a herniated or bulging disc. But what caused the herniated or bulging disc?

We provide this simple demonstration to our patients. We use two coffee cups shaped like back bones (vertebra) to represent two bones from your low back. We use a gel filled ball to represent the disc that is located in between the bones of the low back. The discs act as cushions between the bones in your spine.



With a healthy disc you can bend forward as demonstrated in photo A or sit as portrayed in photo B and *initially* nothing happens to the disc.



Photo A

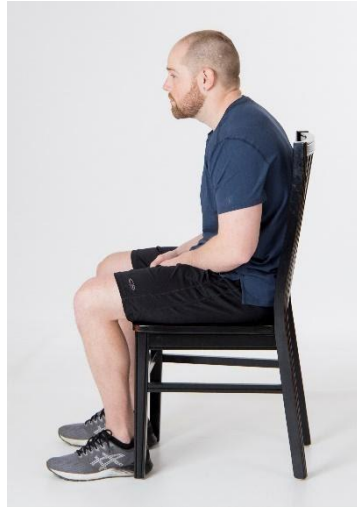


Photo B

However, in both positions you are putting stress on the back part of the discs. The back part of the discs may start to weaken with repeated stress due to poor lifting techniques and poor posture as well as when you age. See photo C.



Photo C

The repeated stress may eventually cause a crack in the disc to occur. With more time and more stress, the gel in the disc may even seep through the wall of the disc. Some people refer to this as a slipped disc or ruptured disc, although the whole disc does not slip or rupture.

Once the disc herniates, it may press or irritate one of the nerve roots coming off of your spinal cord. The pressure on the nerve root can cause pain, numbness, tingling, and burning sensations down your leg.

In our opinion, the main contributing factor causing a herniated or bulging disc is repeated poor positioning of your back. This is your pain maker.

Repeated and prolonged poor positioning of your back will almost always result in some sort of back pain or sciatica. In addition, your disc may not heal if you continue to put your back in poor positions.

The most common position culprits are slumping, slouching, or curved postures of the spine. Poor positioning of your back can occur when you are picking up keys from the floor, getting out of bed, making the bed, vacuuming, picking up laundry, or when you are sitting at your computer. All these activities can be pain makers if performed with incorrect technique.

Below are examples of pain makers:



Picking up small objects from the floor incorrectly



Getting out of bed incorrectly



Making a bed incorrectly



Vacuuming incorrectly



Picking up a laundry basket incorrectly



Staring at a screen with head forward posture and rounded back

Examine each photo carefully. You will note the common denominator. Each of the images shares one trait: a back that is in a slumped, slouched, or curved position. Sadly, this is a common position for most of us when standing, carrying, lifting, and sitting. It is often referred to as the C position because the back resembles a Giant C. **THE C POSITION IS A COMMON PAIN MAKER.**

Placing your back in the C position can cause, increase, and/or perpetuate back pain and sciatica. The C position is stressful and harmful to many parts of your back. The stress becomes most evident when the C position is repeated frequently or held over a prolonged period. If you are recovering from sciatica, the C position can delay your healing.

The C position held over a prolonged period can also cause the ligaments holding the vertebra together to slowly stretch out. As they stretch out, the spine becomes less stable.

Furthermore, your back parts are more apt to move out of proper position when your back is in the C position. In general, your back is more likely to “go out” when your back is frequently in the C position. When your back parts “go out” of position, you are likely to experience increased pain and discomfort.

The reverse is also true. Keep your back in the correct position and posture and it is very difficult for the ligaments to stretch out or the back parts to move out of place. We refer to the correct position of the spine as “a locked in spine”. The spine is locked in the correct, safe position.

The critics will say “I have been placing my back in the C position for years and have not experienced any problems”. Bravo for you, but beware. You are not Gumby and you are not Pokey.



Gumby and Pokey

For those of you too young to remember, Gumby and Pokey are toys known for their flexible arms, legs, and bodies.

You can get away with C positions for a while, but the stresses on the ligaments, muscles, and discs of the spine can be cumulative. Eventually these parts in your back can be injured. Initially, you may not be aware of micro injuries (minor tears) that are beginning to form in the structures of your back because they are too small to give off noticeable pain.

Back pain and sciatica are rarely the result of a single, unsafe act. Rather they are often an accumulation of many factors that have deteriorated the back over a long period of time. Most of those factors occur in the C position. Continue to perform the activities of your daily life in the C position and eventually an “event” will occur. An “event” is a highly undesirable presentation of acute pain and agony.

Whenever you put your back into the C position, you are placing undue stress on many of the structures of the back. This stress can cause the discs to deform (as we already demonstrated with the ball and vertebra example). But it can also cause the ligaments to stretch out and lose their stability. Ligaments are tough

bands that connect bone to bone. When you are in the C position you are placing a continuous stress on ligaments.

Here is a simple demonstration used by physical therapists to illustrate how that stress feels. Grab your ring finger and stretch it back. The discomfort increases if you bring the finger back further and further and if you keep the pressure continuous. Eventually over time the ligaments holding the bones in your finger together may stretch out and lose the ability to hold the hand bones in a stable manner. This occurs occasionally in massage therapists who overwork their fingers and hands. The result of this is more instability and more pain.

The cautionary tale continues: As already stated, if you ALREADY have back pain and you continue to place your back in the harmful C position, your back pain WILL CONTINUE- indefinitely. Keep pounding your finger with a hammer, and it will continue to hurt. Keep poking your eye with a needle, and it will continue to bleed. Continue to place your back in the C position and your pain can go on and on. It is just not a smart move.

The better you understand the problem with your back being in the C position, the sooner you can put an end to it and allow your back to heal. Stop just this one thing and you will help yourself along the road to recovery.

As physical therapists, we can watch a person as they move about their daily life and predict with a fair amount of accuracy whether they will develop back pain soon. The C posture is not a forgiving position.

Our goal is to help you understand that it is the “C” position (slumping, slouching, and a curved posture) that contributes to most forms of back pain. It has been our experience that the “C” position (when repeated frequently or held for a prolonged period) can cause, increase, and perpetuate back pain and pain from sciatica. It is a problem that is common among all humans. You will have a much better chance of healing your back if you can recognize, address, and avoid this cause.