

All rights reserved. All text and photographs in this publication are the property of the author, unless otherwise noted or credited. It is unlawful to reproduce—or copy in any way—resell, or redistribute this information without the express written permission of the publisher. See the copyright page of this book for further limitations and warranties.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword .....	5
About the Author .....	7
Acknowledgments .....	7
Introduction.....	9
<b>Chapter 1: Back Pain Is Very Common, and Here’s Why .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>How Our Genes Lead to Back Pain • How Spinal Discs Work • Why Disc Degeneration Causes Pain</i>	
<b>Chapter 2: Which of the 7 Types of Back Pain Do You Have?.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Take This Questionnaire to Find Out What Type of Back Pain You Have</i>	
<b>Chapter 3: Acute Severe Back Pain: What Could It Be, and What Should You Do?.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>How to Know If You Need Immediate Help • Some Urgent Conditions That Require Emergency Care</i>	
<b>Chapter 4: Choosing The Right Kind of Doctor .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Emergency Physicians • Primary Care Physicians • Psychiatrists • Chiropractors • Spinal Surgeons • Neurosurgeons vs. Orthopaedic Surgeons • Other Specialists • Massage Therapists, Acupuncturists, and Personal Trainers</i>	
<b>Chapter 5: What You Should Know – And Do – If You Have a Herniated (“Slipped”) Disk.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>How You Know If It’s a Herniated Disc • Do You Really Need Surgery? • MRI Scans, CAT Scans, and Myelograms • Surviving an MRI Scan When You Have Claustrophobia • What Does It Mean to “Walk It Off?” • Epidurals • Types of Surgery and Risks</i>	
<b>Chapter 6: Spinal Stenosis: What Is It and What Can You Do About It?.....</b>	<b>71</b>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*How Spinal Stenosis Causes Pain • When to Suspect Spinal Stenosis • Causes and Symptoms • When Surgery Is Necessary, and How It Is Performed*

**Chapter 7: What To Do If Your Pain is From an Unstable or Deformed Spine** .....86

*Spondylolisthesis: The Most Common Spinal Deformity • What Does ‘Unstable Spine’ Mean? • Scoliosis • Osteoporosis • What Is a Spinal Fusion and How Is It Done?*

**Chapter 8: Chronic Back Pain: What To Do When the Pain Just Won’t Go Away** .....99

*Determining the Cause • Arthritis • Degenerative Disc Disease • How Depression and Stress Affect Back Pain • How to Take Control of the Pain*

**Chapter 9: A Plethora of Back-Pain Care: Pills, Exercise, Injections, and Alternative Treatments** .....107

*Anti-Inflammatories, Narcotics, and Muscle Relaxants • Chiropractic • Traction • Types of Exercise • Stretching • Physical Therapist vs. Trainer • Pain Management • Minimally Invasive Treatments • Destroying Sensory Nerves to Treat Pain • Back Braces • ‘Touch’ Therapy*

**Chapter 10: What You Can Do to Avoid ‘Failed Back Syndrome’** .....131

*Don’t Have Back Surgery If You’re Unprepared • Spinal Stenosis and Spinal Instability As Causes • Missed Diagnosis or Multiple Sources of Pain • Adjacent Segment Failure • Unmet Expectations of Surgery*

**Chapter 11: How to Prevent Back Pain From Ruling Your Life** .....137

*Everyday Things You Should Avoid • Exercise: The Best Preventive Medicine • Why Quitting Smoking Is So Important • How to Avoid Pain From Spinal Deformity and Osteoporosis • Managing ‘Whiplash’ Injuries • Sex and Back Pain*

**Chapter 12: Disc Transplants, Replacements, and Gene Therapy: They Sound Good, But Do They Work?** .....149

*Risks of Artificial Disc Replacement • Disc Transplants – Potential for the Future? • Hope in Gene Therapy*

Glossary .....157

Index .....162

# CHAPTER 11

## How to Prevent Back Pain From Ruling Your Life

I was in my late 20s when I had my first attack of back pain. I realized that I was not taking good care of myself. I had been a college lacrosse player but stopped exercising regularly after graduation. I also made the big mistake of taking up smoking – during medical school, no less! With a combination of sitting in classes for long hours, lack of exercise, smoking, and a family history for bad backs, it was inevitable that I would suffer an attack of back pain.

Although I had already stopped smoking by the time of my first back-pain attack, I had not yet resumed exercising. I vowed to begin a lifetime of exercise so that I would never suffer like that again. My father, who lived a sedentary life and smoked, suffered repeated attacks of back pain, whereas my mother, who exercised daily and did not smoke, never had back pain. I began to emulate my mother, and started exercising on a regular basis. To this day I have a propensity for backaches, but I have never suffered from a disabling attack like my first attack of back pain. My wife and I walk four miles a day several days a

*How can I keep from having back pain again? How can I control the chronic pain that I have? How can I keep from getting bent over when I get older like my grandmother? How can I keep my children from suffering like I have from back pain?*

week, and I am also otherwise physically active. My MRI scan shows that I have multiple degenerated discs in my spine.

The medical literature substantiates what I have personally experienced and what I have observed from my patients: staying physically fit and not smoking are the two best things you can do to decrease the frequency and severity of back-pain attacks. It is that simple; and you have complete control over your own destiny!

## **Everyday things to avoid in order to prevent back pain**

There are a few other suggestions regarding your everyday activities that will help keep you from having an attack of pain. There are certain activities that can bring on attacks of neck and back pain that may not have occurred to you. You may not associate these activities with your pain because it frequently does not come on until a day or two after doing them. One of these is sitting on the floor. When I sit on the floor and play with my grandchildren, I invariably will develop back pain a day or two later. Other activities that will do this are lifting heavy travel bags into the overhead compartments of airplanes or, even worse, lifting bags off the carousels in baggage claim. Usually this requires that you quickly snag a heavy bag (if it was light you would have carried it on) and then twist as you lift. Lifting a heavy object while twisting and being off balance is a very bad move for your back.

It has been shown that, to prevent back pain, children should avoid carrying heavy book bags. Weight lifting is not good for children and adolescents, and hyperextension sports such as gymnastics are associated with back pain in adolescence.

Sleeping on your stomach can bring on neck pain, particularly if you are not accustomed to doing this. I have found that sleeping in this position is more difficult as I get older and develop more degenerative changes in my neck. Looking up for any extended period of time, such as by sitting too close to the stage in the theater, cleaning ceilings in your kitchen, or watching overhead fireworks, can bring on attacks of neck pain. Conversely, I almost always develop neck pain after reading an interesting book for a few hours