

Pilates and Sports Yoga

Why do I have backache?

by

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Most backaches can be prevented by addressing the root cause of the ache or pain. This root cause is usually attributed to a lifestyle choice or work activity. Other backaches may be caused by an illness or injury and will need more than basic changes in lifestyle choices or in your work activity. These backaches usually require medical diagnosis and a treatment plan to help you recover from surgery, which could be, for example, from a laminectomy, discectomy, microdiscectomy, or spinal fusion. Or your condition could be chronic, such as osteoarthritis or osteoporosis, acute such as a slipped (herniated) disc, or even an overuse injury such as spondyloysis. Whatever the medical reason for your back pain, a Pilates treatment plan can be created to help you. And through my past experience, I have found that Pilates works!

Before we look at the root causes of backache, let's first look at the components of your back. Your spine consists of vertebrae (bones), muscles, ligaments, tendons, and cartilaginous discs, which all work together to help you stand, sit, and move. If any of these individual components are not functioning properly, and therefore, not working together, you will experience backache.

Your back can be divided into upper and lower back. Since most people experience lower back pain, let's look at your lower back first. Your lower back, your lumbar area, lies directly above your bottom and is probably the most common area of your back for pain to occur. The reasons for back pain can range from poor posture either sitting and / or standing, weak abdominal muscles, or a lack of flexibility in your spine and hip joints. Being overweight could also be a reason for your back pain as it puts additional pressure on your spine when you're sitting, standing or moving. You also might have an injury such as a pulled muscle in your lower back area which may have been caused by using improper lifting techniques at work, home, or even weight lifting. Other stresses and strains to your back could have been caused through your work which requires you to get into unusual body positions (i.e. working in tight spaces, for example by electricians, marine engineers, plumbers, house painters, other engineers, etc.). Other causes such as, road accidents, cancer, ruptured disc, herniated disc, vertebrae deterioration, all fall into the more serious causes of backache and you will need a medical diagnosis and treatment plan to address the results of any of these causes.

Your upper back, the area from you neck to the end of your rib cage, can also be an area for pain. If this pain is located more in your upper back than in your neck, it may be caused by tight musculature, poor posture, or an over-balanced effect of more muscle development on one side of your body. This latter may be caused by your participation in a particular sport or exercise regime, or by lifestyle choices, or be work related. If the pain is located more in your neck, the pain could be caused by arthritis, torticollis (wry neck), injury (whiplash) or illness, for example.

Postural conditions, such as scoliosis, kyphosis (rounded shoulders), or lordosis (sway back) may or may not cause you any pain (at the moment), but can lead to future problems if not addressed.

So, how can you prevent backache? If your backache is a result of lifestyle choices then... Exercise is a great way! If your backache is a result of work activity, then...Exercise! If your pain stems from an illness or injury where post-operative or post-illness care is needed, then Exercise! And by exercise, of course, I mean Pilates or Sports Yoga! Earlier in this article, I said that I have found through personal experience that Pilates is effective on different back problems. Some of the conditions that clients have presented with, and which I have worked with them on have included: osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis, postural problems including scoliosis, kyphosis and lordosis, osteoporosis, back problems associated with Parkinson's

disease, as well as, back surgery.

What is exciting to me about Pilates and backache, is that I look at the root cause of your pain and then formulate an individualized Pilates programme for you to help alleviate your back pain, as well as, teach you how to approach your lifestyle choices and work-related positions in a more body friendly way. In your Pilates session you will concentrate on strengthening, not just your core, but the whole area around your middle which in Pilates is referred to as the “powerhouse”. (Please, see my article on “The unanswered questions surrounding your core”, for more explanation on this.) While you are focussing on strengthening this area through your personal programme, you will also address achieving more flexibility in your hips and upper legs, which will help you to stabilize your pelvis. You may find over time that you will not have to constantly think about it – it will gradually become second nature to you!

I would also encourage you to aim at maintaining a healthy weight (if you don't do this already) as this helps reduce backache. A healthy weight removes some of the stresses and pressures on your spine as you are sitting, standing, or moving. If you smoke, quitting smoking will also help relieve some of the pain. When you smoke your circulatory system is hindered from delivering all of the needed oxygen to this area which your back components require to function properly. And finally, concentrating on good posture, sitting, standing, moving, or lifting will also contribute to an elimination of backache.

Notable quote:

“If your spine is inflexibly stiff at 30, you are old. If it is completely flexible at 60, you are young”. (Joseph Pilates 1883 - 1967)

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