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the most important factor in strengthening your core

by Dr. David Lee, Chiropractor / ART Provider

Strength, Flexibility, or Endurance?

Before I begin rehabilitation sessions with my patients suffering from neck and back pain, I ask them this question: "Of the three muscle factors that help prevent neck and back pain, which of the following is most important: strength, flexibility, or endurance?" Approximately 95% of my patients guess either strength or flexibility. The correct answer is endurance.

Strength and flexibility are definitely important factors in preventing neck and back pain, but how would you account for a strong power lifter or a flexible gymnast who suffers from neck and back pain? One of the primary reasons why most people suffer from neck and back pain is not always because their muscles aren't strong or flexible enough, but because these muscles fatigue too quickly, therefore reducing their ability to effectively support your spine. Understanding this will help you to dramatically and effectively change the way you strengthen your core.

How does this change my core strengthening workouts?

The average person typically assumes that a person with strong core strength is someone who can dead-lift 500 lbs, or is able to perform sit-ups with 200 lbs on their chest. The truth of the matter is that a person with strong core strength is someone who can hold a simple position for a long period of time. An example of this is the plank exercise (Fig. 1). Many practitioners now use this exercise as a predictor for lower back pain. Individuals who can properly hold this position for over a minute are significantly less likely to develop lower back pain, than those who can't.

This is because your core muscles are different from most of your other muscle groups. Most of your muscles are weight bearing muscles. For example, the primary function of your biceps muscles is to bear weight (ie., to lift a weight from point A to point B). The primary function of your core muscles is to stabilize and support your spine in a certain position for a long period of time.

What do I do next?

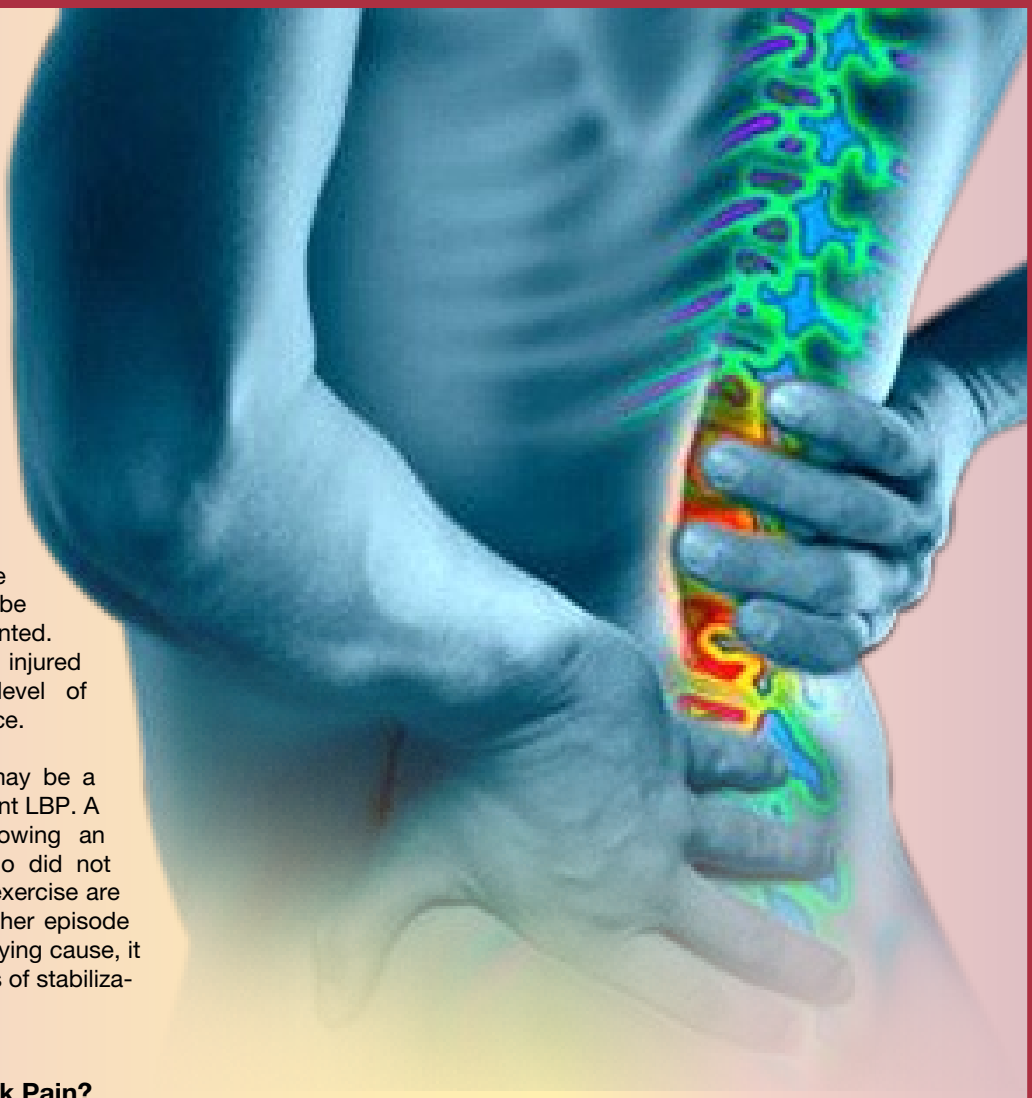
For those of you currently experiencing neck or back pain, the first step is not to strengthen your core, but to properly diagnose the root cause of your pain, and administer the appropriate therapy to treat it. Strengthening while in pain can further exacerbate your injury. If you are currently experiencing pain feel free to book an appointment or free consultation with me.

For those of you currently without neck and back pain, be proactive and properly strengthen your core to prevent any future injuries. To learn effective and appropriate core strengthening exercises, contact any of our fitness professionals at the Adelaide Club (ie., pilates instructors and personal trainers). If you have any questions or would like more guidance on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Fig. 1

the low back pain epidemic

by Charlotte Savela, Physiotherapist



Statistics show that Lower Back Pain (LBP) affects 80% of the population at least once in their lifetime, and is the second leading cause of work absence next to the common cold. This epidemic can be treated and more importantly prevented. My primary focus is to help the injured person return to their highest level of function, without pain or reoccurrence.

The appropriate exercise regime may be a very effective way to treat and prevent LBP. A landmark study showed that following an episode of acute LBP, people who did not perform specific deep stabilization exercise are 12 times more likely of having another episode within 3 years. To correct the underlying cause, it is important that I assess what types of stabilization exercises are best for you.

Will Sit Ups prevent Lower Back Pain?

This is the main question I am constantly asked in my office. While sit ups strengthen the entire abdominal muscle group, they do not engage the primary spinal lumbar stabilizing group known as the transverse abdominis (TA) and multifidi muscles.

Whenever I ask my patients to contract their TA of multifidi muscles, they are unable to do so due to weakness, or inability to contract them. This posses a big problem for LBP sufferers as these muscles are very important in stabilizing the spine and eliminating the shear forces between the vertebrae, reducing LBP and dysfunction.

Physiotherapy: an Effective Treatment for Lower Back Pain

Many high grade scientific studies have found physiotherapy to be an effective drug free way in treating lower back pain. There are many techniques that I use to decrease pain, promote healing, and restore a full range of motion. This may include manual therapy, electrical modalities and range of motion exercises. After decreasing pain and correcting the underlying cause, I can then teach strengthening exercises and educate you on proper body mechanics.

If you have low back pain or any other injury, contact Charlotte Savela PT at Adelaide Health Clinic - 416-367-5200.