

# Avoiding a bad back at work

In your busy working day, chances are that your back is not one of your highest priorities... until it starts to give your grief!

**Back pain can dramatically** affect your concentration, productivity and general sense of well being. During a typical work day, PAs are involved in activities that may aggravate back pain. Osteopath Dr Alicia Tye-Smith, on behalf of Bad Backs, shares a few simple tips, to help reduce the risk of back injury.

## Listen to your back

Pain is a warning sign. If what you're doing hurts, then stop. Do not try to push through the pain; it's your body trying to tell you something.

## Get the ergonomics right

Make sure your computer screen is positioned so that the top of the screen is level with, or slightly lower than your eyes to promote good back and neck posture. Position your keyboard as close to the front edge of your desk, as is comfortable. Adjust your chair so that you are in an upright position, with feet firmly on the floor.

## Straighten up

Try to maintain a good posture by not slumping in your chair or hunching up over your desk. Imagine there is an invisible cord from the top of your head to the ceiling lifting you into a tall, relaxed posture. A gentle posture support or lumbar cushion may help too.

## Take a break

It's recommended that you get out of your office chair every 30 minutes to an hour. You can get very sore and stiff while seated in the same position for hours on end. Remember – humans weren't designed for extended hours at the computer!

## Move it!

Exercise regularly to help keep the muscles that support your back strong and flexible – they need to move. Of particular importance are the lower back and abdominal muscles. Consider warming up like an athlete by stretching before you start your working day.

## Sleep easy

It's important to get enough quality sleep. For most people, sleeping on your side in the 'foetal' position is usually less

stressful on your back. And it's usually advisable to choose a firm sleep surface that allows your spine to maintain its natural 'S' curve.

However, if you have suffered a back injury, it's best to consult a health care practitioner for advice on the best sleeping position for you.

## Lift correctly

Although heavy lifting is probably not in your job description, every PA at some stage of their career, has had cause to do some lifting. If you find yourself in this situation, stop and think before you act. Perhaps there is someone that can help you lift a heavy or oversized box, before you tackle it on your own. When you pick up anything get it close to your body, bend your knees and keep your back straight and avoid twisting.

## Watch your weight

If you're overweight, then you're in a higher risk category for back problems. By keeping to a healthy weight, you will be putting your spine under less stress.


## Manage your stress

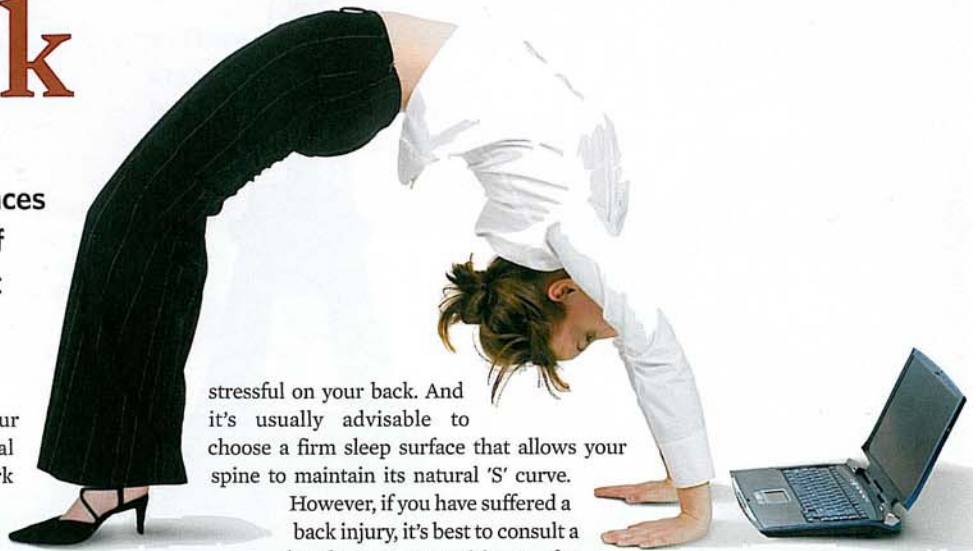
When under stress your back, neck and shoulder muscles often tighten up – that's when a sudden movement can trigger a painful muscle spasm. Learn how to relax your mind and body. Consider a therapy such as massage, meditation or yoga – try a convenient lunchtime session to help you take that well-earned break.

## Speak to your boss

If you think your work conditions are unsafe, or if you have ideas on how to make them better, make sure you speak to you boss, or OH&S Officer. Don't wait until it's too late!

## Stay positive

Researchers tell us that positive thinking individuals will report less back pain, regardless of the amount of perceived stress in the individual's life. All working environments however still have the potential to be healthier. By choosing a combination of ergonomics, exercise, stress reduction and healing treatments as you need them; you can promote the best spinal health for yourself, and stay happy and healthy at work. 



## CONTACT

For more information on avoiding back pain visit [www.badbacks.com.au](http://www.badbacks.com.au)