

SPINE MYTHS BUSTED

Dr Kishen, a city-based spine specialist busts 10 common MYTHS about spine-related ailments

DR. THOMAS KISHEN

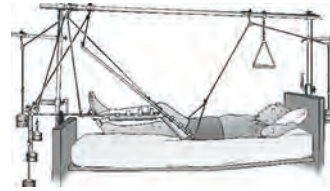


✓ Neck and back pain is amongst the common reasons why people consult a doctor, second only to the common cold.

Spine-related ailments are common in adults, especially between 40 and 60 years of age. If the pain is spontaneous (without injury), does not travel down to the legs and is of a short duration (days to weeks), it is likely to settle down with or without a short course of simple pain killers. If the back or neck pain does not settle down or if it is associated with symptoms of a nerve compression — pain radiating down the legs or arms and tingling, numbness and weakness in the arms or legs — it necessitates a medical consultation.

In view of the high prevalence of neck and back pain, there are numerous myths that need discussion and clarity.

The writer is a spine specialist at Manipal Hospital, Bengaluru.



Traction was known to be the treatment for back pains

6. TRACTION IS THE ONLY TREATMENT

Recent research has shown that traction does not provide any benefit and is without rationale. In addition, traction may also be harmful if the spine is unstable.

1. YOU SHOULD TAKE COMPLETE BED REST

For acute sufferers (pain lasting a few days to three weeks) restriction in activities for a few days may help the pain to settle down. However, enforced bed rest for more than one or two days is not recommended. For persons suffering with chronic pain (more than three months), bed rest does not provide long term relief and may actually prolong the chronicity of the pain.



2. AVOID BENDING FORWARDS

Avoiding bending and other day-to-day activities increases the disability associated with back pain. People having back pain can bend and pick up objects from the floor by bending their knees (half squat).



3. YOU SHOULD SLEEP ON A HARD SURFACE

It is advisable to sleep on a comfortable and firm mattress that supports the natural curves of the spine. Using a mattress that is either too soft or too hard will not maintain the normal curvatures of the back.



4. AVOID USING A PILLOW

People who sleep on their sides will most certainly need a pillow to maintain the alignment of the neck. However, a very thick pillow can increase neck pain by twisting the neck in the opposite direction.



5. YOU SHOULD WEAR A SPINAL BELT/CORSET

Using a belt for long periods of time can lead to the abdominal and spinal muscles becoming weak which are then unable to provide sufficient support to the spine. Back exercises strengthen muscles and support the spine are advisable.

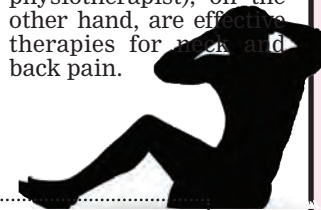


7. PAIN KILLERS TREAT BACK PAIN

Pain killers are useful to reduce back pain of short duration (less than a few weeks). However, long term use of pain medications has side-effects like gastric (stomach) irritation, stomach ulcers, etc.

8. EXERCISE IS BAD FOR NECK AND BACK PAIN

Recent scientific studies have shown that passive treatments (where the therapist does all the work) like massage and electrotherapy, (TENS, ultrasound massage, Interferential Therapy (IFT) and Short-Wave Diathermy (SWD)] are not effective. Manual therapy and exercises (as taught by an exercise therapist or physiotherapist), on the other hand, are effective therapies for neck and back pain.



9. SPINE SURGERY IS DANGEROUS

In today's age spine surgery is as safe as any other surgery. The use of modern scans, an improved understanding of spinal pathology, better surgical instruments and well-trained surgeons have improved the results of spine surgery.



10. AFTER SPINE SURGERY, ONE CAN NEVER LEAD A NORMAL LIFE

In the past, three to six months of bed rest following spine surgery was the norm. Nowadays, the duration of stay in hospital for spine surgeries varies from one to seven days and most patients are able to sit, stand and walk prior to discharge. However, bending and lifting may be delayed for a few months. The aim of surgery is to restore the patient to normalcy.

Ask a doc

'I'm getting thinner and thinner'

Q I am an 18-year-old girl. I am getting very thin day by day. What should I do to stay fit? Please suggest medicine or supplements or even meals that I must take?
— Monica Singh

A You need to adopt a healthy lifestyle by taking a balanced diet, doing physical activity and reduce the intake of junk food. It is also important to reduce your mental stress if any and follow some mind calming techniques like meditation.

If the weight loss is because of nutritional imbalance then you need to take a balanced diet. A balanced diet should include adequate amount of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals.

The quantity and quality of food you eat is most important. Include a variety of whole grain cereals like rice and wheat, whole grams and dal or fish, skinless chicken, fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, nuts and 8-10 glasses of fluids every day. Your diet should have three meals, two snacks and liquids in between. Start a physical activity like walking, aerobics or Yoga for 30 minutes.

If still there is weight loss then you should consult a doctor to rule out hormonal imbalance. Medicines and supplements work only tentatively.

— Perka Srilatha, Dietitian, Global Hospitals

Q I am a 20-year-old girl. Recently, I put on some weight. As a result, I have grown a double chin. I feel low due to this. How can I reduce this naturally at home?
— Veronica Coz

A Have a healthy diet with high fibre food, low calories and nutritious enough. Besides, do physical exercise for at least 30 minutes daily. In the case of fat accumulation not showing any decrease, kindly consult a cosmetic surgeon.

— Dr Lakshmi Kanth T., Minimal Access and Bariatric Surgery Surgical Gastroenterology, Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital

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