



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
Trusted advice for a healthier life

Habits for a healthy back

If you find yourself dealing with back problems on a regular basis, it's worth making sure that your everyday habits are "back-friendly."

When done without proper form, routine activities — vacuuming the house, working at your desk, driving, gardening, or even sleeping — can take a toll on your back. Be kind to your back by following these tips:

- Choose good seating. Your office chair should provide good back support — ideally, with an adjustable backrest, lumbar support, armrests, and wheels). Arrange your workspace so you don't have to do a lot of twisting to reach for frequently used items.
- Travel light. Don't overload briefcases, purses, or backpacks.
- Drive with your back in mind. Sit back in your seat and, if necessary, use a rolled blanket or towels behind your lower back for lumbar support. Shift your weight occasionally. If you have cruise control, use it when you can. Also consider using a foam seat cushion to absorb some of the vibration. When driving long distances, take frequent breaks to stretch.
- Sleep in alignment. If you can, sleep on your side with your knees bent and pulled slightly toward your chest. Your pillow should keep your head level with your spine — you don't want your head propped up too high. Choose a mattress that's firm enough to support your spine.