

Got back pain? Get back to basics

Many people with back pain may be trying the wrong kind of treatment to relieve their symptoms.

This was the conclusion drawn from the results of a consumer survey presented to the Australian Pain Society Annual Scientific Meeting held in Sydney recently.

In commenting on the survey results, Professor Andrew McLachlan from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Sydney, said that better management of back pain would lead to better health outcomes for the individual and a less severe impact on the health care system for the community.

Back pain is an extremely common condition with 80% of Australian adults saying they have suffered back pain in the last six months; and sufferers of back pain indicate that they suffer, on average, 15 days of pain each month.

Fortunately, it is rare for back pain to be caused by a serious medical condition; and most cases get better within a few weeks. Nevertheless, if the pain is extremely troublesome or long lasting, you should see your doctor.

In treating back pain, movement is the key to success. Contrary to popular opinion, rest can be counter-productive – in fact prolonged bed rest can be harmful. Yet, according to the survey, one in eight Australians ignored recommendations to remain active.

According to Professor McLachlan there are also many misconceptions about how to get the best from pain relievers to help manage back pain. Paracetamol is generally recommended as the first choice medicine for pain relief, he said, but adequate doses are essential if benefit is to be expected.

“There is evidence of under-dosing with pain reliever medicines,” said Professor Mclachlan, “it’s as if people think they can take a couple of paracetamol tablets today and the pain will be gone for the week. We want people to be using the right medicines, in the right doses over the appropriate period of time.”

For truly effective pain relief with paracetamol the recommended adult dose is two 500mg tablets four times daily.

Back pain specialist Dr Vik Wilk, a founding member of the Australasian Faculty of Musculoskeletal Medicine, told delegates at the Pain Society Meeting that back pain sufferers should seek objective evidence based information.

“I would encourage people to consult health care professionals for advice about managing back pain. Pharmacists, GPs and physiotherapists are all good sources of advice,” he said.

The recently updated Fact Card *Back Pain* is one such source of relevant information. It lists the possible causes, treatment options and self help hints to avoid the recurrence of back pain. The Card is available from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society’s Self Care health information.

Muscle and ligament strains are the most common causes of back pain – and the neck and lower back are the most common sites of pain. Things that can put us more at risk of injuring back muscles and ligaments include: poor posture, heaving lifting and bending, weak muscles due to lack of exercise, sitting for long periods especially in poorly designed work areas, and poor mobility or staying in one position for too long a time.

Being overweight can increase the risk of back pain and emotional stress can increase tension in the back muscles.

To help avoid the emotional and physical stress of back pain pick up one of the *Back Pain* Fact Cards from your nearest Self Care pharmacy. For locations, check out the Pharmaceutical Society’s website at www.psa.org.au and click on the pharmacy finder.