

Yoga for the Back - How Can Yoga Help Deal with Common Back Injuries?

The Spinal Column which is found in our Back is one of the most vital parts of our body. It supports our trunks, protects the Spinal Cord and the Spinal Nerves and is highly responsible for all our posture and movements making Spinal Injuries are painful and sometimes disabling. A lot of people experience some kind of Back Pain at some point in their lives and for some, this pain developed into a chronic of degenerative Spinal Disorders which can cause paralysis or disability. Back Injuries are the leading cause of work-related disability in the United States affecting both Men and Women of almost all age groups. Back Injuries, however, are highly preventable through exercise and proper posture.

An adult's Spinal Column or Vertebral Column is approximately 72 centimeters in length. It is composed of 33 vertebrae which is divided into five categories: 1. Cervical Vertebrae; 2. Thoracic Vertebrae; 3. Lumbar Vertebrae; 4. Fused Sacral Vertebrae, and; 5. Coccyx (Coccygeal) vertebrae. The Cervical Column is composed of seven vertebrae and is positioned at the top of the Spinal Column.

1. **Cervical Vertebrae** serves as the framework of the Neck and support the Head. These are flexible bones. The first Cervical Vertebrae is called C1 or the Atlas and the second is called C2 or the Axis.
2. The second region of the Vertebral Column is called the **Thoracic Vertebrae** which is composed of twelve vertebrae and is located in the chest area or in the middle of the Back. The bone in the Thoracic Vertebrae move with the ribs and protect many vital organs.
3. Next to the Thoracic is the **Lumbar Vertebrae**, consisting of five or sometimes six vertebrae. The Lumbar Vertebrae is larger than the Cervical and Thoracic, and carries most of our body's weight.
4. Located just below the Lumbar Vertebrae is the **Sacrum**, a fused triangle-shaped vertebra. The Sacrum is originally composed of five vertebrae during childhood and fused into one vertebra after the age of 26. This vertebrae consists the Back wall of the pelvic girdle.
5. After the Sacrum is another uniquely shaped vertebra which composed the bottom of the spine called the **Coccyx or Tailbone**. The Coccyx is composed of 3-5 bones that are fused together during adulthood.

Each vertebra has a small opening and are separated by the Intervertebral Discs. Intervertebral Discs are made of fibrocartilage and are designed to absorb and distribute shock from movement.

Most Back Injuries are not fatal and are musculoskeletal - associated with the Bones, Muscles, tendons, joints, and ligaments. According to studies, majority of Back Pain cases is caused by some form of irritation of the nerves that travels from the Spinal Cord through the bones, making the muscles to tense. Irritation can be caused by stress, activity, mechanical problem in the Spine, or a Herniated Disc. Other causes include kidney infection, ulcers, Gastrointestinal Distress, problems in the reproductive organs or other internal organ disorder, including cancer. These injuries may come in the form of Sprain, Strain, Herniated Disc, Sciatica, Scoliosis, Osteoporosis or bone and joint injury like Osteoarthritis and Fibromyalgia.

Sprain and Strain

The most common Back injuries are Sprain and Strain. These are usually caused by too much stretching of the Back, slowing down abruptly, landing awkwardly, abrupt change in direction, and colliding with another person which happens mostly in sports events.

Herniated Disc

Another Back Injury which can cause acute pain and require medical attention is the Herniated Disc. Herniated Disc is often debilitating, symptoms of a Herniated Disc include numbness or tingling sensation in the legs and feet, muscle spasm or cramping, sciatica, loss of leg function, and severe Back Pain. Smoking, lack of exercise, improper diet, Aging, and poor posture contributes in increasing your risk for Disc Herniation. Activities such as incorrect lifting, twisting and the daily wear and tear also increase a person's risk for this Back illness. Disc Herniation may progress suddenly or gradually over weeks or months and it often affects the Lumbar Vertebrae.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a Back Ailment which can happen without symptoms. Osteoporosis is the disorder wherein the bones are abnormally brittle, less dense which is the result of decreased bone mass or a number of different diseases and abnormalities. Symptoms include fracture in the hips, vertebrae, wrist or other parts of the body; curvature of the spine and loss of height. Osteoporosis cannot be cured but may be controlled or prevented. This Back ailment is common in older people, and a person usually does not know that he or she has osteoporosis until fracture occurs. Among the risk factors are gender, race, lifestyle and genes. Osteoporosis mostly affects women than men since they have less bone mass, experience menopause and live longer. Small-boned Women also have higher risk, Asians and Caucasians also have higher risk than Black people. Poor diet, smoking, excessive alcohol intake and lack of exercise also puts you at a higher risk. People who are suffering from or have a family history of diseases like Cushing's Syndrome, hyperthyroidism, and hyperparathyroidism, and other metabolic and gastrointestinal disorders also have a higher tendency to have Osteoporosis.

Scoliosis

Scoliosis is another Back ailment that affects millions of people worldwide. It is defined as the abnormal lateral curvature of the spine to the side, either left or right, and originated from the Greek word which means curvature. This ailment is usually developed during childhood and rarely occurs in adults. Scoliosis in adults usually began in childhood but wasn't diagnosed or treated. Common causes include progression of the disease from childhood, asymmetric degeneration of the joint in the spine, or a combination of both. The Spinal curve in Scoliosis may occur in the Lumbar or Thoracic Vertebrae, though it may also occur in both. The problems can get worse if not treated, and may sometimes cause a disfiguring curve or a large hump in the Back. Though it is usually painless, Scoliosis can sometimes prevent a person from doing some exercises. In severe cases, the spine can rotate and result in prominent ribs on one side of the body making the spaces between the ribs narrow thus causing difficulty in Breathing.

Treatments for Scoliosis include the use of braces or sometimes, surgery. Others try electrical muscle stimulation, chiropractic manipulation and exercise. Though exercise cannot stop Scoliosis alone but it can help in promoting overall health and well-being.

Sciatica

Other common Back ailments are Sciatica, Osteoarthritis and Fibromyalgia. Sciatica is often caused by a Herniated Disc, other causes include Sacroiliitis, Lumbar Facet Joint Syndrome, Piriformis Syndrome, Iliolumbar Syndrome and Lumbar Spinal Stenosis. Sciatica described as the pain along the Sciatic Nerve or start from the buttock to the back of the leg. Sciatica may also cause numbness and tingling or pain in the sacrum. In Sciatica, the pain in the posterior thigh, lower leg or foot can be much worse than the lower Back Pain. Osteoarthritis and Fibromyalgia are the most common forms of arthritis. For more information, visit our site about Yoga for Arthritis.

The most common treatment for Back Pains includes medication, exercise, and a change in lifestyle, sometimes surgery for severe Back Ailments. Yoga is a mild form of physical activity which can help in strengthening Back Muscles and Skeletal system. It can help in controlling and preventing the occurrence and re-occurrence of Back Injuries which can lead to some Chronic or Acute Back Ailment. The practice of Yoga can be helpful to diagnosed disc problems after the acute stage has passed. The Proper Diet and no smoking lifestyle which are part of Yogic Lifestyle will facilitate fast recovery and prevention for Osteoporosis and Herniated disc. Asanas can tone your Back Muscles, make it more flexible, alleviate pain and improve your posture. Yoga lifestyle, Yoga Poses combined with medical attention can decrease the debilitating power of Back Pains.

THE VERTEBRAL COLUMN

