

# Health & Fitness

The Magazine About Your Health and Caring for Your Body

Issue 1

PERSONAL  
MESSAGE

## Understanding the Role of Physical Therapy

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**W**hen patients come to Physical Therapy Services of Guilford with back problems, our primary focus is in helping them achieve relief and preventing re-injury. Often times the painful area does not represent the true location of the problem, similar to when a heart attack victim feels pain in the left arm. Physical therapy can help to define the true problem. In many cases the painful area is usually a result of the body compensating in some way.

Treatment at our facility entails hands-on skilled treatment techniques in conjunction with exercises to maximize rehabilitation. Other traditional interventions employed are modalities such as ultrasound, electric stimulation and iontophoresis.

In addition to the above mentioned interventions, there are a vast number of exercise approaches available to physical therapists for correcting the underlying causes of back pain; there is no one "right" way. It is important to determine what works for each particular person's body to achieve necessary results. Here at PTSG we have a staff of physical therapists with different abilities so that we have a wide variety of skills to draw from.

After reducing or completely eliminating the pain and correcting the underlying problems, our staff then moves into the realm of improving the person's overall



Phyllis Quinn—Owner, Physical Therapy Services of Guilford

fitness level, especially in relation to his daily activities. This includes educating the patient in the various factors that contribute to back injuries and how to avoid them. Techniques on learning to lift properly or setting up one's work station to reduce back strain can also prove helpful. We also educate patients on day to day care of the back for continued health and reduced chances for re-injury.

Education is essential to reducing back injuries. This is where physical therapists have a primary role because of their knowledge of how the body works and what causes injuries. The education they provide may include ways to reduce pain, how to make oneself physically fit for one's job, how to maximize sleep with good positioning, proper posture, rest/activity cycles, and recognizing which activities may cause re-injury. Other state of the art manual therapies include: myofascial release, craniosacral therapy, muscle energy, strain counter strain, and trigger points release.

*"Education is the number one means for reducing back injuries. Physical Therapists have a primary role in this"*

# BACK PAIN

## RISK FACTORS THAT CAUSE BACK PAIN AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

By Gaynor Hale, Physical Therapist



**B**ack problems strike people in all walks of life. It is very common to have back problems. In fact 8 out of every 10 people will be laid up with back pain at some point in their life. Back problems are the second leading reason people miss work. The first is the common cold.

Contrary to belief, back problems are not just a problem for heavy laborers. Actually, people with desk jobs and other more sedentary types of work have a slightly higher incident of back problems than those with heavy physical labor. Being very strong definitely gives you an advantage but does not protect you if you abuse your back. Likewise, having a light, easy job does not protect you either. A back injury can severely cripple you, your family, your finances and your happiness. It can tear your life apart.

Are back injuries, then, inevitable? Not necessarily. There is a lot you can do about it to prevent it from happening or to reduce the damage if it does occur and to speed your recovery.

The key is to reduce the risk factors that cause injury in the first place. What are those risk factors?

### 1. POOR POSTURE

Poor posture is one of the main reasons that injuries occur. This means that the spine's normal curves are either increased (i.e. a swayback posture or a forward head posture) or decreased and flattened out (i.e. your low back rounding out or flattening when you sit). Either way there is an increase in the strain on the muscles' ligaments and joints. The ideal scene for the spine is to have the normal, natural curves. In this position there is the least amount of strain on your back.

There is more pressure in your lower spine when you are sitting than standing or lying down. Also,



people tend to slump their lower back (round it out or decrease the natural inward curve) when they are sitting. This is very stressful to the muscles as well as the joints.

**What to do about it:** When you sit, place a small towel roll at your low back to help support and maintain the natural curve. Specific exercises can help you change your posture. Your Physical Therapist is an expert in exercises and can help you with the correct exercises and the correct sequence to improve your posture.

### 2. FORWARD BENDING

When you bend forward you are putting all your back muscles in a stretched out position and that decreases their strength. Therefore, you can very easily strain the muscles by requiring them to lift a weight, or just lifting your upper body from a bent over position. Because this position weakens the muscles, everything in your back is at risk of injury because it is the muscles that protect everything. The way they protect everything is by pulling you out of harmful positions. So don't put your back at a disadvantage and then ask it to do heavy work!

**What to do about it:** When trying to lift objects or reach below your waist, bend your hips and knees, keeping the natural curves locked in your spine. (Follow the Tips and Tricks on the following page) This not only is safer but also increases your lifting strength. Your Physical Therapist is highly trained in the proper way to lift

Keep a positive attitude about your job and home life. Studies show that persons who are unhappy at work or home tend to have more back problems and take longer to recover than persons who have a positive attitude.

and position your body for any task you have to do. Have your PT show you how to do it safely.

### 3. DECREASED FLEXIBILITY

When your muscles and joints are tight and inflexible they can change the way you walk, sit, stand and move. When you try to move to do a task, tight muscles can be strained. The lack of flexibility in the muscles of your back and legs is a major risk factor for back injury.

**What you can do about it:** Stretching is the key! Stretching exercises also need to be done properly so that you don't cause injury to the muscles—i.e. "bouncing" to stretch tight muscles can cause tiny tears in them that make them sore and tighter. Consult your Physical Therapist to make sure you are doing the ones that are correct for you and that you are doing them safely.

### 4. POOR PHYSICAL FITNESS

A physically fit person is able to work more, play harder, and maintain their energy level longer than those who are not fit. Poorly conditioned muscles do not have the strength, flexibility or endurance that is needed to work properly and that sets you up for injury. Remember, brute strength does not necessarily mean good conditioning. Your ability to reduce the risks of back injury are directly linked to your overall state of physical fitness.

**What you can do about it:** Get on a general fitness program or recreational activity that is appropriate for you. Your Physical Therapist can guide you with this. Remember, "weekend warriors" (those who sit behind a desk all week then try to move mountains on the weekends) end up getting hurt. Get yourself fit for whatever activity you will be doing. Don't take chances.

### 5. ACCIDENTS

Some accidents are unavoidable. So if you should have an accident, you have less risk of serious injury if you are physically conditioned, use proper body posture and lifting techniques and have taken every effort to reduce the aggravations to your back throughout the day.

## Tips and Tricks

### TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SAFE LIFTING:

When lifting objects, back injuries can be avoided if you:

- 1. Keep a wide base of support.** Spread your feet apart with one foot slightly ahead of the other to make yourself more stable.
- 2. Keep the object close to you.** The farther the object is from you the more pressure there is on your low back.
- 3. Bend your knees and hips.** To pick up or set down objects you need to get your hands down to that level. Don't bend over at the waist, bend your hips and knees.
- 4. Maintain your low back curve.** This is the key! Lock in the spine so that you maintain that slightly inward curve in your low back.
- 5. Do not twist or bend sideways.** Face the object you are picking up or working on. If you must turn to change your direction, pivot on your feet.



- 6. Push rather than pull.** Pushing is easier for your back. Brace your hands on the object, lock your natural curve in your spine and slightly bend your knees. This will give you lots of pushing power—safely!



- 7. Use a step stool.** If you must reach over shoulder level, use a step stool to get up closer to the object to avoid more strain on the low back. It's not the weight of the object but the position of your back that causes injuries.



- 8. Get help.** If the object is too heavy or the size or shape is too awkward, ask for help or use some equipment designed to assist you.

**What you can do about it:** Keep yourself physically fit, use safe lifting techniques and posture, use proper tools, don't take short-cuts or try to "muscle through" a job when you have machinery to do it for you. Set up your workstation in such a way that you eliminate unnecessary motions and strain such as bending and twisting. Here is where your Physical Therapist can be of tremendous assistance. They are trained to help fit your workstation to you in ways that reduce the stress and strain.

### 6. POOR WORK HABITS

Using unsafe posture, especially while lifting is a very poor and dangerous work habit. Motions that are repeated over and over in the same direction are also very hazardous. Habits can be changed and it is well worth the time and effort.

**What you can do about it:** Consult your Physical Therapist. They are the experts in helping you spot poor, unsafe work habits and they know what to do about them.

# FAQ

## Why are back problems so hard to get rid of?

Back injuries don't usually happen "overnight." They are an accumulation of aggravations and abuses from lifetime habits that add up over the years. So if you keep doing things the same way you will continually aggravate and damage your back regardless of how good the treatment is. Bad habits can also prevent you from recovering.

## What are the most damaging "habits" we can do to our backs?

The two most harmful things you can do to your back are bending and twisting. These motions not only cause damage to the muscles, ligaments, joints and the discs in your back but they also put your back in a weakened position. Unfortunately most people will bend over from the waist or twist their spine and then try to lift things. By doing so, you put your back in a weakened position and then ask it to do heavy work and then wonder why it hurts.

## How do you avoid bending and twisting?

You can avoid bending by locking your spine into position (with slight natural inward curve in the low back) and then bending with your hips and knees. This is the position the weight-lifters use to lift heavy weights. They use it because it is the safest and strongest position for their backs. You can avoid the twisting by making sure you are facing your task. In other words, have your shoulders and

hips facing the same direction. If you need to change directions, pivot on your feet. Shoes are cheaper to replace than your back!

## I work as a grocery store clerk and have to stand at the cash register for long periods of time. This makes my back ache a lot by the end of the day. What can I do?

Find a small box or a low step stool to place your foot on. This will allow one leg to bend at the hip and knee and will reduce the strain on your low back. You can change feet as frequently as you like. Try different heights and see what is the most comfortable for you.

## I have been out of work for 4 weeks with a back injury. My doctor is sending me back to work on "light duty". Does this mean I should have a desk job?

Sitting for long periods of time can actually be harmful to the low back. There is more pressure per square inch on your low back than there is standing or lying down. "If you have a desk job you can minimize the aggravation to your low back by using a chair that is properly adjusted to you and your work station, and by getting up out of the chair every 15 to 20 minutes and doing a gentle back-bend. It would be a better option to have a job that allows you to sit for short periods of time as well as walk around. Some companies allow workers to "job-share". With this they can swap jobs with another worker at some time during the day or during the week so that their tasks are varied and they can change positions more often.

## Do you need to see a Physical Therapist for your back pain? Take this simple test...

Simply place a check mark in the appropriate box. Once you are done, calculate the number of YES responses and look at the results.

| YES                      | NO                       |                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I wake up in the morning with pain in my back.                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I get pain in my back when I walk.                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I can not bend over easily without pain.                                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My neck goes out at least twice a year.                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I get a sharp pain from my low back down the back of my leg.                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Exercising is too painful for my back.                                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I do not do any exercises for my back during the day.                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have to sit at a desk all day and my chair makes my back ache.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am overweight and can not easily bend over to grab something.                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My back surgery has gotten rid of most of my pain but I still can't do my job yet. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My back hurts every time I lift one of my legs.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My back keeps me awake at night.                                                   |

### Results:

#### Less than 3 Yes

You're doing fine. Exercising may help keep your back in check.

#### Between 3 and 6 Yes

Physical Therapy could definitely be an option for you.

#### Between 6 and 10

We would advise you to see a doctor to get a better diagnosis, but Physical Therapy is definitely an option.



# Featured Physical Therapist



## Mary L. Clark, P.T.

**M**ary Clark graduated from Columbia University in Physical Therapy. She also holds a Masters in Education (Physical Education for the handicapped) and is also a licensed massage therapist.

Mary's special interests include orthopedics, especially hand and upper extremities. More recently she has become interested in women's health issues in physical therapy including manual lymph drainage, pelvic floor dysfunction, as well as osteoporosis.

Mary considers one of the most important aspects of our particular practice to be the relationships developed with patients. This is a direct result of working on a one-to-one basis, seeing their treatment through from start to finish.

Mary's greatest sense of satisfaction comes from knowing she has helped someone return to being pain free. She enjoys working with patients to develop functional Activities for Daily Living and takes great pleasure in having taught patients how to continue on their own to prevent further injury and discomfort.

# SUCCESSSES

## What patients are saying...



I would like to thank you for the care I received since I started therapy. Before starting therapy I had head, neck and back pain. I also had ringing in my ears, shortness of breath, dizziness and no energy. Since I started therapy ten weeks ago my energy level is up one hundred percent, it started to improve after the first visit. My head, neck, back, breathing and dizziness have also improved greatly. Thank you again.

—F.F.

My primary physician recommended physical therapy because my sciatica had me



in severe pain. He suggested my calling Phyllis Quinn of Physical Therapy Services of Guilford, which I did. The results are wonderful. She has helped me tremendously. I attended a wedding reception and was able to dance – even jitterbug! She is a true professional, and tops in her field.

—M.O.

I had been experiencing some insidious back pain that was

causing me significant discomfort when sleeping or standing for periods of time. I began a course of physical therapy. It was only through manual treatments at these sessions followed by a series of home exercises that I was able to sleep through



the night and stand for any amount of time without discomfort. My hope is that more people will become aware of the many ways in which physical therapy can return a patient to good health and ultimately a better quality of life.

—J.T.

"I have been a client at Guilford Physical Therapy for approximately three months, with great success. I went to my general physician with lower back pain and a severe hip shift to the right side and was told to start physical therapy. I began physical therapy with Cory Viens. During this time I learned I had a herniated disc. Cory never gave up on me and now I am pain free and walking upright without my hip deflection.

—P.T.

# Tired of having **BACK PAIN?**



Come and  
Visit Us for a

## FREE CONSULTATION

Find out if Physical Therapy can help you ease the pain and help you gain a new outlook on life. Call us at:

**Branford**  
**(203) 315-7727**



Physical Therapy Services of Guilford was started by Phyllis J. Quinn in 1974 and is now owned by her daughter Phyllis L. Quinn who, along with her staff, has been providing service to the community with exceptional skill and care. Quality of care is the emphasis of the practice which is why a patient gets 40 minutes of one-on-one treatment with a therapist.

Our staff of highly trained physical therapists will tailor a program to fit your needs and bring you to your maximum rehabilitation potential. It's this kind of care that has resulted in so many doctors and patients choosing Physical Therapy Services of Guilford.



*Our trained physical therapists can help you prevent injuries, get fit, and feel great. Let us help you become healthier, more functional, and independent through the best possible treatment and education for continuing self-care.*

**WE CARE ABOUT YOU!**

Call us today for a free consultation at  
**Branford – (203) 315-7727**



500 East Main Street, Suite 310  
Branford, CT 06405  
Between exits 55 and 56 on I95  
in the People's Bank building on Route 1

## Physical Therapy Services of Guilford, LLC

The shoreline's first private practice—established in 1974

### We treat the following conditions:

- Orthopedic and Sports Injuries
- Back Pain
- Sciatica
- Neck Pain
- Headaches
- TMJ
- Dizziness
- Arthritis
- Acute and Chronic Pain/Fatigue

### We offer the following services:

- Sports Rehabilitation
- Orthotics
- Osteoporosis Exercises
- Manual Lymph Drainage
- Vestibular Rehabilitation
- Balance Training
- Incontinence Program
- Hand Therapy

### Manual Therapies Include:

- Muscle Energy
- Myofascial Release
- Craniosacral Therapy