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A Real Pain in the Back

New research from the British Chiropractic Association (BCA) shows more people are suffering than ever before

Research commissioned by the **British Chiropractic Association** has revealed that **over 1 in 3 people in the UK are currently suffering from back pain.**

Extensive research into this growing epidemic has shown that women are suffering more than men and at this time of year. As the cold months are upon us, back pain certainly seems more prevalent however the pain just goes on and on no matter what the season. A staggering 36% of sufferers have been in pain for more than 10 years and a further 12% for 'as long as they can remember'.

So why are so many people suffering? BCA chiropractor Tim Hutchful places a great deal of blame on our sedentary lifestyles: "We're just not as active as we used to be. We spend huge amounts of time sitting down, at work and at home, but then we go from one extreme to another. Because we tend to have such busy lifestyles, when we *are* active we rush around trying to cram as much as we can in. Our bodies are not designed to cope with this type of unaccustomed activity and so we lay ourselves bare to back pain.

From the BCA research, the top triggers for back pain include lifting/carrying, exercise and sleeping - with 24% women and 27% men blaming their beds for their pain. Amongst 15-24 year old men 28% cited their computer as a cause for backache, while 26% women in the same age group put their pain down to their high heels.

Back pain can be debilitating, but even on a lesser scale it can prevent individuals carrying out day-to-day activities that most of us take for granted. Simple things like sleep become impossible because of back pain. The top five activities that back pain has prevented people from doing are:

- Sleeping (35%)
- Exercise/sport/physical activity (35%)
- Housework/DIY (29%)
- Working (27%)
- Lifting/cuddling/playing with children (27%)

It is not surprising that back pain is having such an affect on our everyday lives; the BCA research has shown that 28% of back pain sufferers feel pain on a daily basis and 14% on a weekly basis. And the affect on our jobs is huge. Whilst there are the 67% who carry on regardless, 18% take up to a month off work per year whilst 5% take more than a month.

All of this has huge repercussions on the UK healthcare system in terms of costs. According to industry research, at least 5 million adults consulted their GP about back pain every year; this equates to a primary care cost of £140.6 million. The NHS hospital costs (out-patients, accident and emergency, day-care and in-patient care) are even higher at an estimated £512 million.¹

Not only is the healthcare system taking a hit but businesses are also suffering from the increasing number of sick days being taken. In 2001/02 an estimated 5.7 million working days (full day equivalent) were lost due to back pain caused or made worse by work.²

Physical affects aside; back pain can make people miserable. 64% of back pain sufferers feel that it has a detrimental affect on their mood and sense of well-being. The impact of back pain is worrying.

¹ Palmer K.T, Walsh K, Bendall H, Cooper C & Coggon D Back pain in Britain: comparison of two prevalence surveys at an interval of 10 years B.M.J. 2000 320 1577-1578

² Back Pain in the Workplace: Prevention and Management: Health and Safety Executive

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Tim Hutchful, BCA, continues: “the research has really hammered home how widespread back pain is. With so many treatment options available at the moment we need to address the problem before it becomes part of our lifestyle.

”Pain is a warning sign and our advice is - if there is something wrong do something about it. The fact that people can’t sleep, work or even just cuddle their children due to back pain is shocking. We need to act now before the figures rise, if we carry on as we are back pain could soon affect everyone.”

Advice on how to avoid back pain is available via your local BCA chiropractor, visit www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk or call 0118 950 5950.

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