

Know Your Enemy: Preventing Back Pain

Professional drivers have been shown to suffer a higher than average incidence of back pain and injury – particularly of the lower back. Although many of the factors contributing to this statistic are inherent in the industry, it is the general lack of knowledge surrounding them that causes the most harm. Understanding these factors and adapting your routine can significantly decrease your chances of experiencing debilitating back pain.

Driving – A Pain in the Back

- *Sitting for Prolonged Periods:* The sitting position distorts the natural curve of the spine and can put strain on muscles, ligaments and the discs of the spine, both upper and lower. For those of us who drive for a living, the cumulative effects of sitting all day everyday can cause more serious issues. In fact, the reduced circulation from lack of movement alone can result in an accumulation of waste products, leading to pain and discomfort.
- *Whole Body Vibration:* Low-grade vibrations from your engine and the road surface while driving travel through your seat into your pelvis and spine, and over time, this kind of exposure can cause micro-fractures in the vertebrae, disc protrusion and nerve damage. You also may experience increased muscle tension as a result of your muscles trying to dampen the vibration.
- *Sudden Movements & Lifting:* Awkward and/or heavy lifting after a long drive put undue stress on already stressed muscles, making them much more susceptible to injury. Even getting into and out of your vehicle can easily turn into strained or pulled muscles.

Curb Your Affliction

As a professional driver, you cannot completely eliminate these factors, but now that you know what they are and how they affect you, here are some tips that will help alleviate their impact:

- If the seat of your vehicle does not already have built-in lumbar support, keep your lower back curve healthy by placing a cushion or rolled up towel between your back and the seat.
- Make sure your pelvis is against the backrest of your seat. This stabilizes your back and reduces the impact of vibrations and road shock on your spine. Try adjusting your seat to make this position more comfortable (i.e. move seat forward, adjust inclination and arm rests).
- Avoid sudden or jerky movements, and never lift heavy objects after a long drive without taking the proper precautions. Try walking or stretching to loosen up tightened muscles.