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**The Skinny on Muscle Imbalances – Restoring Order As A Means Of Eliminating Back Pain**

**By Steve Preston**

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There are many causes of back pain. Injury, illness, herniated disks and poor posture are just a few.

Muscle imbalances are one of the lesser side effects of improper use, posture, strain and injury, and are commonly the cause of the aches and pains associated with back pain. Unfortunately, most doctors don't diagnose muscle imbalances until it is too late.

#### Muscle Imbalances Defined

So what exactly is a muscle imbalance? A muscle imbalance is exactly as it sounds, an 'imbalance' or inequality that exists within the muscles. It occurs when two or more muscles in the body that oppose each other are disproportionate.

An example of a common muscle imbalance occurs in the muscles of the quadriceps and hamstrings. Most people work hard to strengthen the front part of their leg but often skimp when it comes to exercising the hamstring. A muscle imbalance in this area of the leg can result in a 'popping' sound in the knee. It can also result in back pain.

The single most common muscle imbalance leading to back pain is disproportionate abdomen to back ratio. Think of it this way... it's like a teeter totter that isn't balanced because one end is shorter than the other. It will still work but not optimally.

Not exercising the abdomen can lead to severe back pain because the abdomen supports the back.

#### Biology of Muscles

It will help your understanding a bit if you have an idea of how muscles work. Muscles are fibrous tissues that connect to bones in the body, supporting the function of movement. To facilitate movement

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muscles contract and then relax. So a muscle gets shorter and then longer in response to movement. A muscle imbalance may result in too much or too little contracting or relaxing. Or, some muscles may get too strong while others aren't strong enough and can reduce a persons' stability.

### Factors Contributing to Muscle Imbalances

One of the primary causes of muscle imbalances is poor posture. If you sit for too long in a bad position or continually stand with bad posture, your muscles adapt to your posture but in a bad way resulting in imbalances.

Muscle imbalances can also result when you overuse a muscle. If you are right handed for example and use a pull lever on the job, and only pull with the right hand, the right hand/arm will be stronger than the left which presents an imbalance.

### The Benefits of Exercise

The good news is that exercise can help reduce and even eliminate muscle imbalances. (If not careful however, improper training can also lead to muscle imbalances).

You can exercise weaker muscles to catch them up to stronger ones and work to correct imbalances and maintain overall stability. You can assess whether or not opposing muscles are out of balance by testing your lifting strength. Try lifting your maximum on one side and then the other.

For example, if you can lift a 10 pound weight during a bicep curl on the left side, but a 30 pound weight on the right, you have a muscle imbalance. You should enlist the assistance of a trainer when testing muscle imbalances. By working with a trainer, you can develop a fitness program that not only addresses muscle imbalances but improves overall tone and strength. Usually a combination of strength training and physical therapy or chiropractic therapy can be used to correct muscle imbalances.

### Prevention

Prevention is critical when it comes to muscle imbalances and back pain. One of the best things you can do to correct and prevent future injury is seek out the help of a professional trainer. A trainer can perform a physical evaluation and test the relative muscle strength you have on each side of the body. You can then work together to develop a strength training program that provides overall strength and eliminates potential problem areas.

Steve Preston, President of Fast Fitness has been training and counseling clients for 15 years. He offers personal fitness training, metabolic testing and customized fitness and nutrition plans. His new guide *\*The Better Back Guide: 6 Weeks to Improving Strength and Reducing Pain Without Surgery\** teaches people how to reduce, eliminate and prevent chronic back pain using a six week program. You can read more about his guide and his other fitness guides and services at:

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## **Addressing The Cause And Finding A Cure: Why Cause is Everything When It Comes To Low**

### **Back Pain**

#### **By Steve Preston**

There is an epidemic, at least in the States when it comes to treating back pain. Most doctors do just that... treat back pain rather than finding and eliminating the cause.

You can treat your symptoms for an eternity, and you may feel better for a short period of time. To truly get at the heart of the matter though, you have to find and eliminate the cause of low back pain.

I'll let you in on a little secret. Most chronic low back pain can be resolved in six weeks or less. It's true!

A majority of chronic low back pain is caused by simple factors including: Poor Posture Injury Muscle Imbalances Improper Lifting Extra Weight

Let's take a look at each of these more closely.

#### **Poor Posture**

Posture is everything when it comes to back pain. Good posture results in stability and strength. Bad posture results in back pain. Many people can alleviate chronic back pain simply by taking the time to improve their posture. You probably can too!

#### **Injury**

We are all subject to injury at one time or another. You can work toward preventing injury in certain circumstances however. A lot of the injuries that result in low back pain are caused by improper lifting techniques. You may be lifting a heavy box, or you may be lifting a heavy weight without warming up adequately. Either way, if you injure yourself you are subject to back pain. What can you do to improve your chances for recovery? One of the best things you can do is exercise. You should incorporate stretching activities into your daily regimen. By doing so you will condition your back and are less likely to get injured, and more likely to recover faster when you do get injured.

#### **Muscle Imbalances**

Muscle Imbalances occur when two muscles that oppose each other are unequally matched. If you exercise your back regularly for example, but never exercise your stomach, your body will be in a state of imbalance. No matter how strong your back is in this situation, you are going to be subject to back pain. Eliminate the muscle imbalances through rehabilitation and proper exercise and you stand a good chance of eliminating back pain.

#### **Improper Lifting**

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OK, go back and re-read the section on injury. You need to lift correctly in order to avoid injury. NEVER bend from the waist when picking something up off of the floor, even if it is a feather. Always bend from the knees, and use your leg and abdominal muscles to support you when lifting an object. Many improper lifting injuries actually occur in the gym. This happens when a person attempts to lift a weight that is too heavy or fails to warm up properly. You can avoid these injuries by paying close attention to technique at all times.

### Extra Weight

Carrying around a few extra pounds may not seem like a big deal, but when it comes to back pain it could mean the difference between no back pain and chronic back pain. Even if you are carrying around just ten extra pounds, your body will have to shift and redistribute itself to accommodate the extra weight. Consider losing the extra weight, and you may realize your back pain soon follows.

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