

IN THE PINK OF HEALTH

# THE PINK PAGE

KNOWLEDGE SERIES  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FROM FORTIS

## WATCH YOUR BACK!



## Ageing problems that sneak up on you

As people age, they find themselves squinting more often at those hard-to-read fine prints, or asking others to speak louder with increasing frequency. It's a well-known fact that eyesight and hearing tend to diminish over time, but did you know that the spine experiences similar wear and tear? Spinal problems result in many elderly patients developing balance and co-ordination difficulties, changes in bowel and bladder habits, and degenerative ailments in unexpected places. It's time to sit up straight and take notice! A flexible and well-conditioned back can not only help in avoiding spinal injuries, or minimising the severity of the injury if the spine is traumatised, but also in relieving many back conditions, making the retirement years much more pleasant.

### Common spine problems faced by the elderly

Spinal ailments can range from the mildly annoying to the painfully crippling in terms of severity. And, without the right care and attention, they can wreak havoc on your lifestyle and peace of mind. Watch out for these back problems that are common among the elderly.

**Disk Degeneration:** The intervertebral discs tend to become more fibrous and inflexible as the spine ages. This leads to a loss of fluid in the discs, affecting their ability to act as shock absorbers, making them less flexible. Degeneration can also occur when tiny cracks form in the outer layer of the disk. The nucleus, a jelly-like material inside the disc, may be forced out through the cracks, causing the discs to bulge, split open, or break into fragments. The most common symptom

relating to disc degeneration is usually back pain radiating to the buttocks and upper thighs.

**Osteoarthritis:** The most common form of arthritis, spinal osteoarthritis impacts the vertebral facet joints that enable the spine to bend and twist. As the facet joints deteriorate, the cartilage may become inflamed and eventually start to break away from joint surfaces. So, when the vertebrae begin to rub together, the surrounding nerves and tissues also become inflamed, making movement painful. It may also trigger the formation of osteophytes (bony spurs) which lead to the narrowing of the spinal disc, and cause the affected disk to collapse.



**Spinal Stenosis:** Mostly caused by wear and tear resulting from ageing changes, spinal stenosis is a narrowing of the open spaces within the spine. This puts pressure on the spinal cord and the nerves that travel through it, leading to a number of problems. While some people show no signs or symptoms, spinal stenosis can cause pain, numbness, muscle weakness, and problems with bladder or bowel function in others.

### Tips to a healthier spine

- Add exercises like swimming, cycling, walking or crunches to your workout routine.
- Use a firm mattress while sleeping as it reduces any curve in the spine. Get a new mattress if your existing one is over 10 years old.
- Learn to relax, as stress and unhappiness at work or home may end up causing back pain.
- Adopt a healthy diet and maintain a desirable weight.
- Warm up and stretch before intensive physical activities.
- Refrain from lengthy inactivity or bed rest.

Smoothieicious!

As the body ages, it loses its ability to produce the enzymes necessary to break down cooked food. Healthy, convenient, and portable, smoothies are an easier way to eat a day's worth of fruits and veggies – whether as breakfast, an afternoon snack or dessert.

Here's a quick and easy recipe for a green smoothie.

In a blender, mix 2 cups of chopped organic spinach, frozen berries (preferably blueberries), a chopped banana, coconut milk, a little water, a little olive oil and/or flax seed oil, a sprinkle of sea salt, and some protein powder of your choice.

Try one smoothie a week and work your way to a healthier, happier you.



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