

# MAFES Dawg Tracks

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™  
MS AGRICULTURAL AND  
FORESTRY EXPERIMENT STATION

Back Health

Back problems are experienced by 80% of Americans at some time during their life. Many back problems are caused by loss of flexibility, stressful living, or bad work habits. Good lifting technique and good back posture also contribute to having a strong and healthy back.

**Nutrition** is one of the most neglected parts of maintaining a strong back. If you put on a certain amount of weight to the point where you have a “pot belly”, you will develop a “sway” back. Ideally, your back should be balanced correctly on your spine, but if you develop a sway back, that means that your spine’s balance is lost. Carrying around extra weight puts a lot of strain on back tissues and those tissues will wear down over time.

**Stretch** to help maintain flexibility and a healthy range of motion and better prepare you for the demands and rigors of work.

**Exercise** your core to strengthen abs and back muscles. Your core muscles—your lower back and abdominal muscles—need to be strong and supple in order to support your spine and take pressure off your lower back. Unfortunately, for most of us our core muscles are rarely used during everyday activities; they need to be toned through specific, targeted exercises.

**Sleep the Right Way.** The amount of rest you get is important, and so is the position you get it in. Sleeping in a bad position or on a mattress without support can cause back pain.

- Back sleepers should put pillows under their knees.
- Side sleepers should place pillows between their knees to keep their spine in a neutral position.
- Stomach sleeping causes the neck and head to twist and can put undue stress on the back.

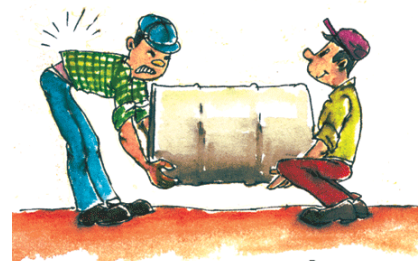
**Avoid fixed positions** for long periods.

The discs in your lower spine are loaded 3 times more while sitting than standing, so long periods of sitting can create or aggravate a painful back condition. Get up to stretch and walk around every 20 to 30 minutes, try working at a standup desk for at least part of the day, or get up and pace around when talking on the phone.

Sometimes you may be required to stand still in one place for long periods of time. Some people write this off as just stiffness, but by the time you are feeling stiff, your back has already started to develop low level tissue damage. Prevent back spasms and break up periods of long standing with stretch breaks, or simply sit down, to increase circulation in your back and reduce back strain.

**Ditch the brace.** It’s tempting to baby your back muscles, but back braces should be used sparingly. Braces are helpful for strenuous activities, like heavy lifting, but only keep them on for 15 minutes at a time. If you wear a brace all day, the muscles — which should be providing stability — weaken and you will have less core strength. Therefore creating even more potential for injury.

**Lifting & Carrying  
There's  
a Wrong Way ...**



**and  
a Right Way!**

For more info contact – Leslie Woolington  
**MAFES /MSU-EXTENSION**  
**Risk Mgmt. / Loss Control**  
(662) 325-3204

Sources:

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