

DR. ASHFORD'S 10 STEPS TO A HEALTHY BACK

1. **Walking** is the simplest form of exercise, but too often overlooked. Walking 30 minutes a day promotes strength, endurance and balance. Walk at a brisk pace, hold your chest up, look forward and team with others to keep camaraderie.
2. **Core** strengthening exercises work the torso or abdominals to create support for the spine. A trained physical therapist can best instruct you on a daily program.
3. **Posture** is critical to the proper alignment of the spine. Sitting or walking with proper alignment will relax the muscles allowing the spine to function with the least internal stresses.
4. Awareness of Body **Mechanics** allows for protection of the spine. Excessive lifting, twisting or awkward motions should be avoided. Lifting should be done with the object close to the body, directly in front, knees bent and preferably with help or if you have a known spine condition, not at all!
5. Body **weight** is never the cause of a bad back, but certainly adds more physical stress to the spine. A loss of one pound takes two to three pounds off the spine. During heavy lifting, the spine supports 5 to 10 times your body weight. A loss of ten pounds can yield a decrease in 100 pounds less stress to the back.
6. **Smoking** cessation is the single best health decision anyone can make. Smoking inhibits the microvasculature that sustains the vital structures of the spine. This can lead to progressive degeneration and in the case of surgery, leads to poorer outcomes and higher complications.
7. Active **lifestyle** includes your favorite activities in daily routines. Swimming, Yoga, Pilates along with activities in the gym will keep muscles and bones strong. Activities should be done regularly in a consistent and moderate level. Any new activity should be worked into a routine slowly, if it hurts, DON'T do it. The most important gauge of success is if you enjoy it.
8. The treatment of **Osteoporosis** is not medications. It begins in your 30's, to maximize bone density and then to maintain it for the rest of your life. Calcium, vitamin D and weight bearing exercise, walking light weight lifting, are essential. Don't be afraid to ask for a "Bone Density" or DEXA scan to check for osteoporosis by age 50. If osteoporosis is identified, then medications can be added to help fight the loss of bone.
9. **Balance** training is essential to ambulation and is quickly lost after the age of 70. Tai Chi classes, walking on uneven surfaces or balance boards are very effective to increase the sense of balance. If your balance is already wavering, seek direction with a trained physical therapist, for a specific balance program.
10. **Stress Relief** is essential to a balance in our health. Meditation, prayer, yoga, deep breathing or simple quiet time away from the rigors of life, allows the body and mind, time to rebuild.