

Working from Home Can be a Pain in the...Back

These days more and more of us are working from home. And, not coincidentally, more and more of us are suffering from back pain. "People are—a lot of times—working in spaces that aren't ergonomic," Dr. Ron Riesenburger, neurosurgeon and director of the spine center at Tufts Medical Center told *CNN*. "A lot of people have makeshift offices. They're using chairs without proper support, without proper cushioning. And I think a lot of times they don't even have a desk." So, Riesenburger continues, "They're putting their computer on their lap or something like that, and that really forces them to hunch over sometimes in

a very awkward position. That awkward position can put added stress on the muscles of the neck and the muscles of the back." And there is long list of other factors that cause back pain.

Back pain that doesn't improve with rest or weakness or results in numbing or tingling in one or both legs are signs of severe back problems and you should see a doctor. But if you don't have these more serious symptoms there are some steps you can take to reduce back pain.

Move It or Lose It

"The more you sit the more pressure you put on the cushioned discs between the bones in your back," says Joel Press, a rehabilitation physician at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City quoted in *AARP Magazine*. "Every 30 minutes, get up and walk around. This will squeeze fluid out of your discs, helping to head off pain. If you're game, consider investing in a sit-stand desk."

Let Your Emotions Out

"If you keep a stiff upper lip, your back may pay for it," according to *AARP Magazine*. People who shut down or 'stonewall' during a fight with their partner are at higher risk of developing back pain, according to a 2016 study published in the journal *Emotion*.

One reason may be that those who are upset or anxious are more likely to tense back muscles. In general, 'if



A lumpy, sagging mattress contorts your body. Most sleep experts say after seven years it's time to go mattress shopping.

someone is depressed or anxious,' says anaesthesiologist Yury Khelemsky, a pain specialist at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, 'they will have a worse experience of a pain signal than someone who is in a great mood, with great coping skills and social support.'"

Shed a Few Pounds and Upgrade What You Eat

"Even losing just five pounds can take a load off your spine," Dr. Press explains. Studies have found that those with a high BMI (body mass index) have a higher risk of developing back pain.

The doctor also points out that chronic pain is made worse by inflammation. One way to reduce inflammation is with an anti-inflammatory diet that's centered on fruits, vegetables, lean protein such as fish and chicken, and healthy fats such as nuts and olive oil.

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Dump Your Old Mattress

If your mattress has seen better days, it's time to pitch it out. A lumpy, sagging mattress contorts your body. Most sleep experts say after seven years it's time to go mattress shopping. And when you shop, a medium firm mattress, as opposed to a very firm mattress, appears to be best for your back, according to a 2015 review published in the medical journal *Sleep Health*.

Your Mom Was Wrong. It's Not Poor Posture.

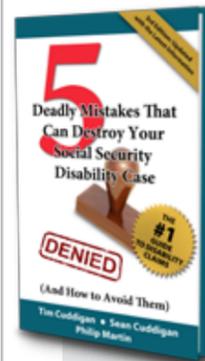
"Perfect posture doesn't exist - If 'poor posture' was the only reason for your pain, you'd be in pain permanently," says Rushabh Savla, a specialist in shoulder, neck and head injuries.

"The problem is the amount of time we spend in a particular posture, so a more likely cause of your back or neck pain is lack of movement." He recommends periodic gentle stretching exercises. To find the exercises that suit you, Google 'gentle stretches for lower back pain'.

For More Immediate Relief

Increasing the blood flow will relax your muscles. Try taking a hot shower and direct the stream of water to tight areas for ten minutes or so. A heating pad can ease the pain and you can use one while you work at your desk. You can also work out specific painful spots by massaging the area with your fingers, a handheld massager or even a tennis ball. Another

often effective remedy is to soak in a bathtub of hot water infused with Epsom salt.



The Pandemic is Affecting VA Operations With Some Surprising Outcomes

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has forced the department of Veterans Affairs to work differently and in an unexpected twist the VA may actually be reaching more veterans.

It is estimated that 97 percent of the VA staff is currently working from home and department officials said in an interview with the *Military Times* that they have seen an increase in productivity. "We're seeing our employees' availability and utilization at a higher percentage than usual," VA Under Secretary for Benefits Paul Lawrence explains.



Also since VA offices are closed, the department has begun holding tele-town halls. As of late May the VA has held the telephone-based meetings in 13 states and reached more than 350,000 veterans. "Ironically, they really have enabled me to touch a group of folks who aren't on social media, [or] print media, the places we usually go," Lawrence says. "It seems like we're reaching an older generation of veterans, and telephone is the way they engage."

As a result of the pandemic the VA has waived some in-person exams and the deadlines for some veterans benefits applications have been extended, but you will want to check with your VA office to determine if these temporary rule changes affect your individual case.

"5 Deadly Mistakes That Can Destroy Your Social Security Disability Case" is the #1 guide to improving the odds of winning a disability case.

For a FREE copy for you or someone you care about call Cuddigan Law at 402.933.5318 or email us at lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com



Comfort Food

From the kitchen of Janet Cuddigan

For these hot days of summer, a cool beverage is always a big hit. I know you'll really enjoy this refreshing, fruity drink.

Watermelon Refresher

½ seedless watermelon
2 cups cold water
½ cup white sugar (or to taste)
½ cup water

Scoop flesh from watermelon half and transfer watermelon to a blender. Add 2 cups cold water and blend until liquefied, about 1 minute. Strain through a fine mesh strainer into a large bowl to remove fibers. Discard fibers left in strainer. Skim and discard excess foam from juice if desired.

Place sugar and 1/2 cup water into a saucepan over medium heat and stir until water is hot and sugar has dissolved. Turn off heat and let simple syrup cool to room temperature. Stir simple syrup into watermelon juice to taste. Pour drink into a 2-quart pitcher and refrigerate until cold, at least 30 minutes.

To serve, fill tall glasses with ice cubes and pour watermelon refresher over ice.

Adapted from allrecipes.com

Question of the Month: How Long Will My Social Security Disability Benefits Last?



Once you are approved for Social Security disability your benefit payments will last until one of three things happen:

- You reach retirement age;
- Your medical condition improves and you are able to return to work;
- You start working and earn too much money.

Retirement Age.

For both Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), once you reach your retirement age your disability benefits automatically convert to retirement benefits. For SSDI recipients the benefit amount remains the same, but for some receiving SSI prior to retirement age they will receive a different amount once they reach early retirement age. It will depend on your benefit amount.

Your Medical Condition Improves.

If your medical situation improves to the extent that you are no longer disabled, your Social Security disability payments will end. Social Security periodically assesses SSDI and SSI beneficiaries with what is known as a Continuing Disability Review (CDR) to determine whether a recipient still qualifies for disability benefits.

Earning Too Much Money.

SSA says that if you are engaged in work (even part-time work) that results in what SSA calls "Substantial Gainful Activity" (defined by earning above a certain amount) you may not be eligible for disability benefits. For non-blind individuals, the monthly SGA limit for 2020 is \$1,260.

Brain Teaser

Among timepieces, a sundial has the fewest moving parts. What timepiece has the most moving parts?



For the brain teaser solution go to cuddiganlaw.com/library/newsletter

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