

TAPESCRIPT

Four out of five Americans will endure a serious episode of back pain at some point in their lives. So why is back pain so common? One of the main reasons we experience back pain is because we sit in chairs. It's really that simple! Even though millions of years of evolution have designed our spines to do otherwise, we eat, travel, and sit in chairs for hours at a time. Sitting on the floor **cross-legged**, as is standard in many developing countries, is much better for our backs. This forces the spine into perfect **alignment** and maintains flexibility in the hips. For this reason, back pain is much less common in Asian nations. Our modern **chair-bound** lifestyle cramps and stresses our spinal discs, weakens back muscles and reduces hip flexibility. It is clinically proven that the less flexibility one has in the hips, the more back pain will result. To understand why our backs hurt, it helps to look at the how this part of the body works. The back is made up of layers of **interwoven** muscles that **wrap around** the S-shape of the spine. The spine has twenty-four vertebrae connected by facet joints. The vertebrae are **cushioned** by shock-absorbing **pads**, called intervertebral discs. These discs fill with fluid that absorbs shocks and **dissipates** the energy of **harsh impacts**. When we're born, this shock-absorbing fluid is 80 percent water. But as we age, these discs gradually lose water and turn **brittle**. This is one of the **underlying** causes of **persistent** back pain and loss of flexibility. This natural aging process, combined with our chair-bound lifestyles, **contributes** to our back pain epidemic. Another surprising cause of back pain is actually, "all in our heads." A relaxed, balanced **posture** is the key to a pain-free back. To achieve this healthy **stance**, a group of cells called proprioceptors send data to the brain regarding the proper position and alignment of muscles. But in our hectic lives, we often don't stop to listen to the signals our bodies send us. The more we ignore these signals, the worse our posture - and our pain - becomes. To test your own body and mind connection, try this. Stand on one leg with your arms extended at shoulder height. You'll notice a little **wobble**, but probably nothing you can't control. Now increase the difficulty by closing your eyes. The better your mind/body connection, the longer you'll be able to maintain this position. This exercise demonstrates that the mind is a vital instrument in **maintaining** healthy balance in the back. Whether it is from consistent poor posture, **excessive** chair sitting, or just from the natural process of aging, back pain is all too common. The good news is: there's help for chronic back pain!