

Ask The Professionals

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Georgetown

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Marta Masley
B.Sc.(PT), M.C.P.A.

Q: I hurt my low back about a year ago. It got better within a month, but frequently I have recurrences of low back pain. The episodes usually last a few days, and are usually provoked with over-activity. Is there anything I can do to put an end to my back pain?

A: Studies show that following a low back injury, pain recurs in almost 80% of the people within one year. Studies also show, that there is a strong relationship between dysfunction of the multifidus muscle and recurring low back pain. This important back muscle attaches to other structures in the back that when contacted, can help stabilize the back. Within 24 hours of a back injury, the multifidus muscle is known to atrophy and weaken. Its recovery is not spontaneous. This means that it does not regain its size and strength on its own. It needs to be retrained specifically. General exercises (i.e.: swimming, walking, running) do not guarantee a re-trained multifidus.

Multifidus strengthening is not strenuous, but does require concentration. A basic multifidus exercise involves lying on ones stomach imagining that you are a Barbie doll and just got your leg pulled out of the hip socket and are trying to pull the leg back into the socket. Pelvic movement should be minimal with this exercise, and you should avoid hiking the hip up. It may seem like you are not doing much, but in fact the mere visualization of this exercise is already recruiting the multifidus.

Keep in mind, though, that since you do not spend your day lying round, you need to retrain multifidus in a more functional way applicable to your lifestyle. Your physiotherapist will be able to progress you on an appropriate program.

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Karen
MacKenzie-Stepner

Q: At the beginning of the school year we received a letter from our child's school requesting that we send 4 tennis balls to our child's classroom. The teacher commented that it helped with the noise. Can you explain more?

A: While we know that studies have shown that noisy classrooms affect learning it is often difficult to eliminate some of the sources of noise (e.g., heating and air conditioning ventilation, fans in overhead projectors and computers, traffic noise outside, etc.) we can reduce other sources. Classrooms are inherently noisy places. Often the majority of the noise is made by children talking and chairs moving on uncarpeted floors. To give you an idea of sound levels, teachers' voices are often at a loudness level of 65 dB. During activity times, loudness levels range from 70 to 85 dB. The sound of one chair scraping on the floor of a portable classroom was measured at 85 dB. (The sound of a motorcycle or a jackhammer is about 100 dB.) Now imagine multiple chairs scraping across the floor, constantly. This noise can be distracting to students as well as teachers. As well students must try to hear instruction from a teacher who is straining his/her voice over background noise. Children who have typical learning abilities as well as children which hearing, speech and/or language difficulties are all affected by this increased noise. Placing tennis balls over the feet of chair in the classroom can help eliminate this frustrating background noise and in turn help the classroom more conducive to learning.

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Christoph Summer
Owner/Administrator

Q: With so many price variables when choosing a retirement home how do I make a comparison?

A: This seemingly daunting task can be made easier if you plan ahead, give yourself time and ask *lots* of questions.

Find out exactly what is included in the quoted rate. Is the cost all-inclusive or is it for the room only?

What nursing services are provided and are any extra costs clearly itemized? Be sure to ask about costs you may incur now and "down the road". You don't want any surprises.

Are three meals a day provided in the cost? Are snacks included? If there is a meal plan, what are the costs and what is included? What is the cost if you have guests stay for a meal? If you are ill, will you get a tray to your room at no added cost?

If housekeeping is included, how often is the room cleaned and is the bathroom cleaned daily? Is personal laundry included and if not, what charges can you expect?

Ask to see the rooms and establish how the room size is determined. Find out the area of *living* space. Some rooms include the bathroom area in the equation, some don't. Also, don't hesitate to see rooms with furniture in them.

Are there private bathrooms or are the bathrooms shared? Do the bathrooms include a shower in addition to a sink and toilet? Sometimes the shower is down the hall.

In short, ask many questions so that you are comparing the cost of similar services and living space.

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Jeff Brookfield

Q: I have heard a lot about vermiculite insulation in the news recently. How do I know if I have it in my home and should I be concerned?

A: Vermiculite was sold as insulation in bags and typically installed by the homeowner. It was an acceptable material under the Canadian Home Inspection Program (CHIP) (in the '70s and '80s). Thousands of homeowners installed it in their walls and attics.

Some vermiculite came from a mine that contained asbestos. Asbestos can be a concern when particles become airborne and are inhaled over a long period of time. Asbestos is known to cause lung disease, cancer, asbestosis and other serious respiratory illnesses.

It is impossible to determine if the vermiculite in your home contains asbestos without first having it tested.

An AmeriSpec home inspection will identify the possible existence of vermiculite in visible areas of the home. The presence of vermiculite does not necessarily mean that asbestos is present. Laboratory testing is required. You can download a Fact Sheet at www.HomeInspectorsHelp.com



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Q: My Doctor diagnosed me with Facet Joint Pain in my low back. What is a Facet joint?

A: The Facet Joints are the joints that are found on the back of the vertebrae. They have articular cartilage, which line the bones. The role of the facet joints is to limit excessive movement and to provide the spine with stability. Facet pain usually occurs due to sudden excessive movement and or as a result of chronic degeneration of the facets articular cartilage. Injuries in the facet often result in one-sided back pain that is accompanied by muscle spasm and stiffness. Facet pain usually occurs with prolonged sitting and standing and is aggravated by backwards bending.

Treatment for the facet joint injuries initially is oriented towards settling down pain and muscle spasm. The Physiotherapists at Eramosa Physiotherapy Associates will direct you into the position and postures that will help you reduce your discomfort. Manual therapy techniques and modalities such as heat, ice, acupuncture and TENS can also be utilized to decrease your pain while specific exercises will be incorporated to strengthen YOU! and return you to your activity PAIN FREE!

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Julia Fountain
BSc, ND

Hair Loss in Women:
Getting to the root of the problem
As you read this, 90% of the hair on your head is growing and 10% is just sitting pretty. Healthy hair grows for 4-6 years then enters a resting phase of 2-3 months before being shed. Most people shed about 100 hairs a day. Once a hair is shed the growth stage begins again as a new hair from the same follicle replaces the shed hair. New hair grows at a rate of approximately 1/2 inch per month. If your hair isn't measuring up, consider some of these factors:

Nutrient depletion: This is the most common cause of hair loss in women before the age of 50. Iron deficiency is the first deficiency to consider but deficiencies of protein, essential fats, B vitamins and minerals such as zinc, silica, iodine and boron can contribute. Nutrient depletion can be caused by poor diet (processed foods, picky eating), but also by chronic dieting, poor absorption or a very active, demanding lifestyle without nutrition keeping pace. The good news: once the deficiencies are corrected and diet improved, the hair will grow back.

Hormone changes: This is the most common cause of hair loss in women after menopause. A decline in estrogen and progesterone levels result in a relative excess of testosterone and its derivative, dihydrotestosterone (DHT). DHT shortens the hair growth phase and shrinks the hair follicles. The production of DHT is regulated by an enzyme called 5-alpha reductase and natural substances such as beta-sitosterol, L-lysine and green tea extract are believed to act on this enzyme and decrease levels of DHT. Hair loss can also be a symptom of thyroid disease in women of all ages. Lack of thyroid hormone can result in poor mineral absorption which in turn can be reflected through hair. Thyroid disease may also speed up the conversion of testosterone to DHT in the hair follicle. Hair loss in women can also be a symptom of polycystic ovary syndrome in young women.

Pregnancy: Women lose less hair during pregnancy as a larger percentage of hair follicles are in a growth phase. After a woman gives birth a large number of follicles shed hair at once. Hair typically returns to its normal fullness and growth cycle within a few months. If not, investigating nutritional and hormone status can be helpful.

See more next month or call for more information.

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Barbara Byckowski
Investment Advisor, BBA, PFP, CFP

Q: We go South to Florida every winter. One of our friends mentioned that we need to be careful how much time we spend in the U.S. - that there can be tax implications! Can you please tell us more?

A: Many people are surprised to learn that their presence in the US, even if they are only vacationing, can create U.S. tax and reporting obligations on their worldwide income if their U.S. residence status is "U.S. resident alien". In order to determine U.S. residency status, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) applies a test known as the "substantial presence test". This test averages the number of days you were present in the U.S. during the past three-year period, beginning with the current year. Failure to understand the U.S. tax obligations imposed by the IRS can result in unpleasant surprises and costly penalties. For a copy of an article that provides a basic understanding of U.S. residency under U.S. tax laws and potential ways to avoid U.S. tax and reporting obligations associated with being considered a U.S. resident alien, please email me at Barbara.byckowski@rbc.com or call at 905-450-1850 and I will send you a copy of the article.

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SUSAN S. POWELL

Q: I have been living with my boyfriend for 2 years. I am thinking about separating from him. Am I entitled to spousal support and do I have an interest in his property since we have lived common-law for 2 years.

A: You can not claim spousal support when you are in a common-law relationship until you have lived together for 3 years or longer unless you have had a child together during the relationship.

You do not have the same rights to share property when you are in a common-law relationship as you do when you are married. In most cases, your car, contents at the home and savings belong to the person who purchased them. If you contributed to an increase in the value of the property that your common-law spouse owns you may be able to claim a share in it.

You should consider negotiating a cohabitation agreement with your spouse to agree to terms with respect to spousal support and your property to protect your rights preferably before you live together although it can also be done during the time you live together.

To understand your rights and obligations when you live common-law you should have a consultation with a lawyer.

IN FOCUS physiotherapy

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JENNI VENERUZ

Q: What is Neurological Rehabilitation?

A: A physiotherapist who specializes in Neurological Rehabilitation works with people who have suffered from strokes, brain and spinal cord injuries. They also treat people with multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's and general movement disorders.

Our brains are highly adaptable and with the proper physiotherapy they can re-learn and compensate.

A process called NEUROPLASTICITY actually allows the brain to "re-map" itself and find new ways to do things. Recovery can continue to take place over a period of years.

A neurological physiotherapist will work to stretch and strengthen muscles, overcome spasticity and tremors, improve balance and walking patterns. They may also introduce aids to help the client improve their quality of life and become more independent.

Elayne Tanner & Associates Inc.

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Elayne M. Tanner

Q: I have heard that my emotional state could be impacting my weight. Is this true and if so, what can I do about it?

A: Research connects thoughts to weight. It is found that self-criticism or blame stimulates brain activity that triggers depression, disordered eating and anxiety. If you focus on what you perceive to be your negatives you put yourself at risk for emotional eating and weight gain.

We know that self-image affects the way you behave and care for yourself. When you learn to be compassionate with yourself and treat yourself respectfully, you will take better care of yourself. Here are some behaviours that benefit from counselling and that could be sabotaging your healthy life.

1. Denying emotional needs: When you do not acknowledge and address your emotional issues, you often fill the void and self-soothe with food.

2. Having negative self-perceptions: When you focus on what you perceive to be your inadequacies and imperfections improvement feels hopeless. You deal with feelings of despair by eating. Most negative messages are learned in childhood and can be easily changed.

3. Viewing yourself as a victim: Feeling sorry for yourself perpetuates feelings of shame, humiliation, and self-judgment. These feelings are common in abuse survivors. When you do not believe that you deserve better, you make your outside image match the one you feel inside.

5. Resisting change: You feel terrible and often experience self-loathing but you do not want to risk failing at making changes in your life so you do not try.

6. Reacting from past: Negative messages received in childhood, directly or indirectly, often shape your beliefs in adulthood. Rather than hearing positive affirmations, you constantly hear the deprecating voices and comments of the past. These must be changed to free you to make better choices.