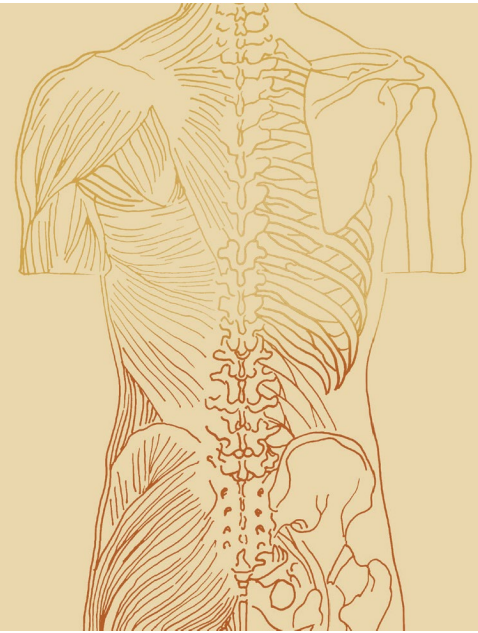


Back Care Awareness



What makes up the back?

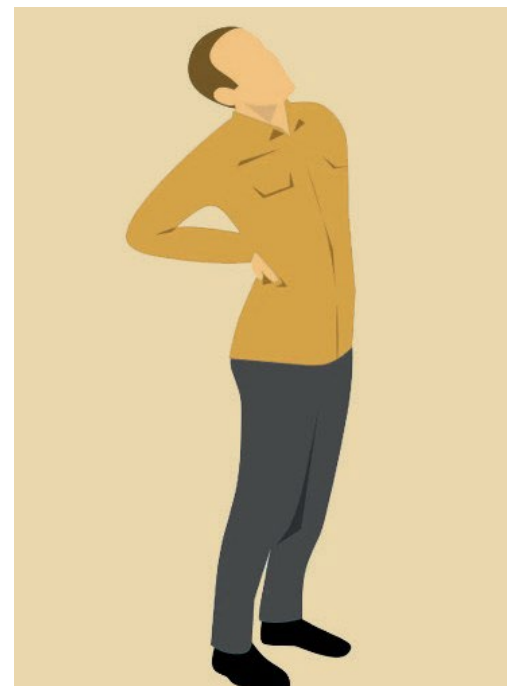
The back is made up of several different structures including the neck, middle back and the lower back. Each of these parts are made up of bones called vertebra. The bones in the neck are referred to as Cervical Vertebra, the bones in the middle back are called the Thoracic Vertebra and the bones in the lower back are called Lumbar Vertebra. It is in the middle back where the ribs attach to the thoracic vertebrae and curve around the body. Between each of these vertebrae are discs which act as shock absorbers.

Over time these discs can become worn. These are called degenerative discs and they can become vulnerable to injury. These injuries could cause bulging or herniated discs. If a disc becomes herniated or starts to bulge it could begin to press on the nerves in the back that connect to the leg and the foot. Once this has happened it can result in sciatica.

Risk factors for back pain

There are many things that can cause pain to the back. Some physical and psychological factors are:

- ❖ Posture whilst working
- ❖ Working constantly with no breaks
- ❖ Long hours
- ❖ Lack of control over work
- ❖ Repetitive tasks
- ❖ Lifting heavy loads



What can you do to help your back at work?

It's important to look after the back as much as possible. There are lots of simple changes we can make to help improve our back care.

Firstly, it's best to look at the office space and the desk set up. To achieve a good desk set up there are several areas which need to be considered, these are the chair, desk, monitor, keyboard, and mouse.

When sitting, posture and chair set up is a key factor to back care. It's important to sit upright with your back being fully supported against the backrest of the chair. Your head should be over your shoulders and inline with your buttocks, arms relaxed by your side with your forearms level with the desk. Your feet should be flat on the floor aligning with your knees or supported slightly higher by a footstall.



Equally as important is your desk set up. All the items on your desk should be within reaching distance, stretching to reach items can cause strain on the back. Computer monitors should be directly in front of you and positioned central on the desk. Your eyes should roughly be level with the top of the monitor casing.



It's better to try and use a separate keyboard so you can move it into the best position. When typing your forearms should be just above the keyboard and the forearms, wrist and fingers should be aligned.



When using a separate mouse your arm should be tucked into your side and close to the body. The mouse should be positioned to avoid the wire dragging and leaving enough space for full movement.



Other easy ways we can care for our backs is to take regular breaks, avoiding long periods of working. It's important to change your posture and give your back a rest. Try to avoid any repetitive activities and share workload between colleagues where possible.



If you're struggling with back pain and you think it could be caused by work or worsened by activities at work it's important to talk to your line manager. If your employer has a health and safety department or representative it may be useful to speak to them and ask about any work place adjustments available. An occupational health referral may also be an option after talking to your line manager.