

## Back Care

### When Caring for a Person with a Spinal Cord Injury

#### 1. Introduction

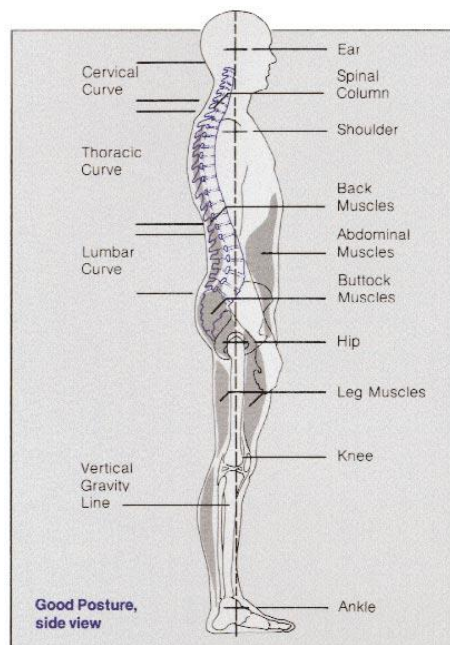
Back injury is the leading musculo-skeletal injury in Australia. Up to 80% of the population will suffer from back pain at some time in their lives. Back injury can result from a single event or from sustained positioning on various spinal joints, bones, muscles and ligaments. Many back injuries are avoidable.

The **aim** of this booklet is to give you some practical ways of **preventing back injury, avoiding re-injury and staying active**. Prevention of back injury is especially important when you have the added responsibilities of being a carer. Because this occupation can be heavy and repetitive in nature, the use of incorrect techniques and/or posture can result in an increased risk of having a back injury.

When performing daily activities in caring for a person with a spinal cord injury, you are doing activities that could put extra stresses on your spine. These extra stresses result from activities such as moving and handling the person you are caring for as well as the daily activities that you have to do for yourself and your family at home. By educating yourself on the principles of back care and handling, and correctly applying them in your daily routine, you can minimise these stresses.

#### 2. Anatomy of the Spine

The **vertebral column** or **spine** is made up of a number of important structures. The spine or vertebral column (see figure 1) provides mobility, flexibility and stability and is made up from a number of bones called vertebrae. When viewed from the side, your spine should resemble a letter 'S'. There are 3 normal curves in the spine – gentle forward curves in the neck (cervical) region and low back (lumbar) region and a backward curve in the upper back (thoracic) region.



**Nerves** arise from the spinal cord and exit on both sides at each vertebral level (see figure 2). These nerves provide the feeling in your skin, and help you contract your muscles to move your arms and legs.

Figure 1: The Spine or Vertebral Column

#### SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215

Fax: 3176 7462

#### OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641

Fax: 3176 5644

#### Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital

Ipswich Rd

Woolloongabba QLD 4102

AUSTRALIA

#### TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508

Fax: 3176 9514

#### Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

#### Postal

PO Box 6053

Buranda, QLD, 4102

#### Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda

Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd

Buranda, QLD, 4102

AUSTRALIA

#### SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507

Freecall 1800 624 832

(for regional clients)

Fax : 3406 2399

#### Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

#### Postal

PO Box 6053

Buranda, Q, 4102

#### Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda

Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd

Buranda, QLD, 4102

AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

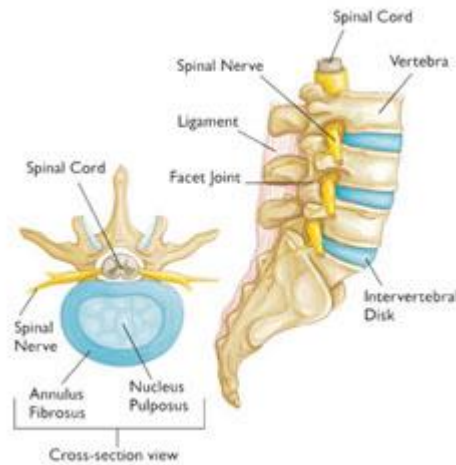


Figure 2: Anatomy of Lumbar Spine

**Joints** in the spine allow the spine to move in almost any direction. These joints are formed by the junction of 2 or more bones.

**Ligaments** attach one spinal vertebra to the next. They don't directly cause active movement of the spine but help to control joint movement passively thereby providing stability to your back.

**Muscles** connect to bone via tendons to support the joints of your spine and control joint movement. Muscles are very effective at maintaining the alignment of your spine and provide the forces needed to move your neck or your trunk into the position desired. However, when muscles become tired, or are put in a position that makes it harder for them to work, the risk of injuring other structures such as ligaments, joints, nerves and discs is increased.

**Discs** are present between each vertebra, and act as shock absorbers due to their gel-like interior. Discs also provide flexibility to the spine.

### Contributing factors to low back pain are:

- ◆ Being overweight
- ◆ Inactivity
- ◆ Poor posture
- ◆ Muscle tension and fatigue
- ◆ Poor movement strategies
- ◆ Physically strenuous jobs requiring heavy lifting, pushing, pulling, particularly when this involves twisting of the spine
- ◆ Smoking, as it slows healing
- ◆ Hereditary conditions such as Ankylosing Spondylitis
- ◆ Presence of other diseases eg arthritis, osteoporosis

### 3. Posture

Posture refers to a position a person adopts, whether in lying, sitting or standing. Correct posture is especially important for people caring for others, where the adoption of bad techniques and poor posture can result in the development of pain and stiffness.

A good **standing** posture is one in which your spinal curves are maintained, you look ahead with your chin gently pulled in, your shoulder blades are gently pulled back and down, your stomach and buttock muscles are gently tightened, and other muscles are relaxed.

## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

A good **sitting** posture is one in which your spinal curves are maintained and you are sitting well back in the chair, upright but relaxed. Avoid slumping. Keep hips, knees and ankles roughly at right angles with knees slightly higher than hips and feet flat on the ground. The use of a support behind your lower back may be helpful if sitting for long periods. Avoid sitting for long periods of time without regular posture changes. Get up and stretch regularly.

A good **lying** posture is one where the support surface is firm and supports the normal spinal curves. A mattress that sags in the middle can cause pain or stiffness. Make use of pillows to support under the knees when lying on your back or between knees in side lying.

### A good posture is one that:

- ◆ Places minimal or balanced stresses on body parts
- ◆ Requires minimal muscular effort to sustain
- ◆ Is comfortable
- ◆ Is regularly changed

### Avoid postures that:

- ◆ Bend you forward, backward or sideways **during** an activity
- ◆ Twist you during activity
- ◆ Combine bending and twisting during an activity
- ◆ Cause you to overreach forward, backward or over head
- ◆ Are static or awkward postures and cause you to overbalance
- ◆ Occur in a poorly arranged work environment that encourages any of the above

## 4.0 Manual Handling

The need for you to perform manual handling techniques will depend on a number of issues, such as the severity of the injury of the person you are caring for. For example, you may have to assist the person in every way with rolling, dressing, transfers and toileting or you may have to provide supervision only in these tasks.

You may have been shown specific manual handling techniques to use when you first provided care to the person with a spinal cord injury. Occupational health and safety guidelines have changed significantly in recent years, and when combined with new research, it is now suggested that some of the old techniques may now be deemed incorrect or unsafe. While these past techniques may have served you well, you may need to consider changing them. Examples such as a 2 person lift or 'bunny hop' are not acceptable transfer options to most services.

**Correct manual handling techniques** require less energy to perform, place less stress on the structures of the back and are comfortable for all people involved. There are certain general principles of manual handling that everyone should follow, regardless of the type of disability and handling and transfer methods used. These general principles are listed below.

It is recommended that in the morning before commencing a daily routine involving manual handling, some simple stretches should be performed. These will help to prepare your spine for the activities of the day. Stretches promote circulation, maintain flexibility and prepare your muscles for loading. Some examples of stretches you can do for your lower back are listed at the end of this Fact Sheet in Appendix 1.

All movements should be performed slowly and smoothly. If you have any problems with any of these stretches, seek advice from a physiotherapist or other trained professional.



## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

Performing an activity involving manual handling is not recommended after a period of prolonged sitting, driving or mowing.

### PRINCIPLES OF MANUAL HANDLING – MINIMISE THE RISK

- ◆ **Plan** the activity – think before you lift
- ◆ Size up the **load**: if it is too heavy or awkward for you, look for other ways. Get extra assistance, use a hoist or other devices such as sliding sheets.
- ◆ Organise the **environment**. Remove any hazards such as water on the floor. Remove unnecessary furniture in the way, use appropriate floor surfaces, position the wheelchair, use brakes and adjust bed heights.
- ◆ Make sure **everyone involved knows** what is to happen. If in doubt, the person who is being transferred is designated the leader and controls the activity.
- ◆ Position yourself as **close to the load** as possible. This will encourage you to use your legs to do the lifting.
- ◆ Have your feet apart to use a more **stable base** and place your feet in the direction of the movement.
- ◆ There is **not one good posture** for every activity. The most appropriate posture used will depend on the task or movement.
- ◆ Use a **firm grip** where necessary.
- ◆ Gently **tighten your lower tummy and your lower back** muscles before performing the activity. This will encourage a good posture.
- ◆ **Avoid bending and twisting** movements of the spine – bend your knees instead. Use postures such as semi squat, half kneel or lunge.
- ◆ **Step and turn** your feet if you need to change direction.
- ◆ Ask for **assistance** whenever and where you can. Use **aids** to reduce the load.
- ◆ **Stop** if there is a problem or discomfort

## 5. Daily Back Care Issues

During the day, you may increase your risk of back pain due to the repetitive nature of your daily activities in caring for a person with a spinal cord injury as well as yourself. In one day you might:

- ◆ Assist with transfers to toilet, bed or car
- ◆ Make adjustments to the positioning of the person you are caring for in their wheelchair
- ◆ Push the wheelchair around (twisting movements)
- ◆ Make adjustments related to the wheelchair such as removing footplates or lifting/placing the chair in and out of a vehicle
- ◆ Assist with dressing and showering
- ◆ Assist with position changes in bed eg rolling
- ◆ Undertake your own daily activities

By **encouraging the person you are caring for, to assist** with the completion of tasks where possible, there will be a lessening of the strain on you. If you have **equipment**, use it to decrease the load. If you have the opportunity to have the assistance of a **second person** when performing many of these tasks, use it. Unfortunately this is not always the case so you complete a great number of activities alone. In addition, the need for repetition of many of these activities will increase the risk of possibly developing pain.



## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

If you are finding the workload difficult, take stock of just how many and what activities you are doing each day, as well as how you do them. You may need to develop a strategy to reduce and prioritise what you have to do. If you must bend, regularly reverse your posture ie arch backwards after stooping postures.

### Recommended Bench Heights

Work should be performed at a height that suits the task and maintains your normal postural curves

- ◆ If you are doing **precision** work, it is recommended that the height of the work bench be just above elbow height eg shaving, make-up
- ◆ If you are doing **light** work, it is recommended that the height of the work bench be at elbow height eg writing, food preparation
- ◆ If you are doing **heavier work requiring greater effort**, it is recommended that the height of the work bench be at hip height eg rolling the person in bed

Below are some **suggested ideas for certain activities** to assist you as the carer.

## A. ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

### Positioning the person in bed

- ◆ The use of a sliding sheet assists in moving the person around the bed or rolling the person.
- ◆ Push rather than pull the person into the position required.
- ◆ Avoid reaching across the bed or the person.
- ◆ Encourage the person to assist where they can. Encourage them to do so.
- ◆ Adjust the height of the bed where possible to suit your height and needs.
- ◆ Use the help of an extra person if it is available.
- ◆ Get as close to the load as you can.
- ◆ Try using one knee on the bed to stabilise your position and bring you closer to the load
- ◆ If you are needing to turn the person a number of times during the night for comfort or pressure relief, ask for a review of the mattress from your local health professional/ OT

### Transferring the person in and out of the wheelchair (or toilet, shower &/or car)

- ◆ Set up the environment so that there is plenty of room with no obstacles in your way.
- ◆ If you, or the person you are assisting, are finding the transfer very difficult, determine the reason. If equipment such as a hoist is available, you should use it. You may need to ask a health professional to review the transfer.
- ◆ If using a hoist, use a firm floor surface to make moving the hoist easier.
- ◆ Step sideways when turning the hoist, keeping yourself in line with the hoist and not twisting.
- ◆ Remove any rugs or mats from the area that may cause you to trip or that may get caught up in the hoist.
- ◆ Always check brakes are on the wheelchair and you are positioned appropriately to provide the necessary assistance.
- ◆ Never attempt to lift a person's whole body weight by yourself.
- ◆ Avoid twisting your spine while performing the activity. Turn your whole body when assisting transfers ie keep your nose in front of your toes.
- ◆ Encourage the person you are assisting to do as much of the transfer as possible, as long as it is safe for all concerned.
- ◆ A sliding sheet can be used to assist with repositioning the person in the chair.
- ◆ If assisting a seated transfer, sit in front and keep your back straight. Turn your whole body when assisting ie keep your nose in front of your toes.





**SPINAL INJURIES UNIT**

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

**OUTPATIENT  
DEPARTMENT**

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

**Postal and Location**

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

**TRANSITIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
PROGRAM**

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

**Email**

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

**Postal**

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

**Location**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

**SPINAL OUTREACH  
TEAM**

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

**Email**

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

**Postal**

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

**Location**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

# Fact Sheet

## Positioning in the wheelchair

- ◆ Don't bend over. Semi - squat down with back straight eg putting on socks or placing the hoist sling or positioning feet

When positioning the person to the back of the wheelchair, slide them back by gently pushing on their knees from the front rather than lifting them back by bending over the backrest. Use equipment such as a sliding sheet to assist where possible. If positioning in a powerchair with tilt in space, place the chair back in tilt to use gravity to assist with positioning

## Pushing the wheelchair

- ◆ Keep your back straight and elbows slightly bent as you push the chair.
- ◆ Make sure the wheelchair is in good condition so it is easy to push eg tyres are inflated
- ◆ Know the features of the chair and how they work eg braking system
- ◆ Avoid taking the person up gutters, travelators or steep ramps unless you have been trained to do so and are feeling fit.
- ◆ If assistance is offered, accept it but provide instructions to the assistant for safety.
- ◆ Ask the person to assist you where possible
- ◆ If the person is heavy and unable to assist you, don't attempt to push them on your own if you are feeling unwell or experiencing any discomfort

## To assist the person in the manual wheelchair up a gutter

- ◆ Face the chair towards the gutter
- ◆ Tip the chair onto its back wheels, using your foot on the tipping level at the back of the chair
- ◆ Place front casters up onto footpath
- ◆ Push the wheelchair up onto footpath
- ◆ If the person can help ask them to do so
- ◆ Push and don't lift

## To assist the person in the manual wheelchair down a gutter

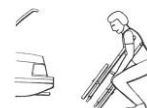
- ◆ Face the chair away from the gutter with rear wheels near the edge of the gutter
- ◆ Stand behind and down the gutter
- ◆ Allow the rear wheels of the chair to move down the gutter while you apply pressure against the movement for control
- ◆ Once the chair wheels are safely down, continue moving back to lower the front casters
- ◆ If the person can help ask them to do so. Encourage them to lean forwards in the chair as they do so

## To assist the person in the wheelchair down a steep slope

- ◆ Traverse backwards and forwards across hill rather than moving straight down the slope
- ◆ Ask the person to lean backwards in the chair for safety
- ◆ If very steep you may need to go down backwards, with person leaning forward

## Showering and dressing

- ◆ Avoid bending for prolonged periods.
- ◆ Raise the height of the working area so that it is the best height for you.
- ◆ Reduce the strain on your spine by maintaining good postural curves that require minimal effort to maintain. You should be comfortable.
- ◆ Minimise the number of repeated sequences of each activity by being well prepared.
- ◆ Use the assistance of aids such as sliding sheets or hoists where possible.
- ◆ Encourage the use of clothes styles and sizes that make dressing easier.



## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

### Lifting objects (eg wheelchair) out of a car boot

- ◆ When manoeuvring the wheelchair into position, push rather than lift it.
- ◆ When lifting, keep the item close to your body. Use your knees and hips.
- ◆ Step and turn with your feet if you need to change direction.
- ◆ Use a 2 stage lift to move the chair from the ground into the boot. Use the edge of the boot as a lever, protecting it with a heavy blanket if you wish.
- ◆ Place heavier items close to the edge of the boot.
- ◆ If possible, lighten the load to be lifted by removing items such as wheels, armrests and/or footplates off the chair and place them in separately.
- ◆ Ramps, hoists and wheelchair loaders should be used in certain circumstances to minimise the need to lift the item.
- ◆ Make sure the car is parked in a level area where you can easily access the boot and place objects on the ground.

### Overhead Lifting

Heavy items should **not** be stored or lifted overhead where possible

When lifting overhead:

- ◆ Stand in a stride stance position to counterbalance any overhead work.
- ◆ Reach overhead with your weight through your forward foot.
- ◆ Store commonly used items between shoulder and hip heights.
- ◆ Use a foot stool to increase your height advantage if you feel it's safe to do so and the load is NOT heavy

## B. GENERAL DAILY ACTIVITIES

### Ironing

- ◆ Ensure ironing board is at elbow height
- ◆ Use a foot stool or box and stand on a shock absorbent mat.
- ◆ Avoid standing for long periods of time. Iron small amounts at a time.
- ◆ Iron by moving the iron away from your body, applying pressure
- ◆ Store the ironing basket or clothes at hip height to prevent trunk rotation
- ◆ If you experience pain, take regular breaks of walking or sitting.



### Washing

- ◆ Bend at your hips, when reaching into the machine to retrieve wet clothes.
- ◆ Front loader machines are ideal ergonomically ie bend your knees rather than bend over to retrieve the clothes. Raise the height of the machine if possible.
- ◆ Use a trolley to take loads to the line, or carry small loads by hand.
- ◆ Excessive bending or reaching should be avoided when hanging out clothes - use a trolley and wind the clothes line down as much as possible, or stand on a small stool with a stable base.

### Vacuuming/sweeping/mopping

- ◆ Use long-handled tools, and upright vacuum cleaners.
- ◆ Use shorter strokes, changing direction with your feet and not by twisting your trunk.
- ◆ Swap sides regularly
- ◆ Avoid leaning forward by bending hips and knees.
- ◆ Always face the area being cleaned.
- ◆ Vacuum one room at a time and have a break in between to allow you to change postures.



## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

### Making the bed

- ◆ Raise the height of the bed if it is too low, to avoid reaching or excessive bending.
- ◆ Move the bed away from the wall if possible and easy to do, to allow good access.
- ◆ Kneel on the bed at times when making the bed to avoid reaching or excessive bending.

### Cooking

- ◆ If necessary, raise height of work bench to waist height by using thick cutting boards
- ◆ Store commonly used items within shoulder and hip heights.
- ◆ If standing for a long time, try to rest one foot on a low stool (or on the lowest shelf of a cupboard) to relieve pressure through the lower back.
- ◆ A tall stool can be used to 'perch' on to prepare food.
- ◆ If standing causes pain, take regular breaks

### Gardening

- ◆ Kneel or sit in preference to bending.
- ◆ Change posture regularly.
- ◆ Use long handled tools to avoid bending.
- ◆ Do small areas at one time.

### Mowing

- ◆ When starting the mower, place it against a wall or hard surface and then pull the starting cord - predominantly use your arm and avoid twisting or jarring your back.
- ◆ Push rather than pull the mower.
- ◆ Maintain an upright posture, using your legs for power and not your back.
- ◆ Mow small areas at a time.
- ◆ Empty the catcher when half full to reduce the weight to be lifted.
- ◆ Consider using a 'touch-start' or lighter weight electric mower.

### Cleaning cars, walls, windows etc...

- ◆ Fill bucket to only half full to reduce the weight to be lifted.
- ◆ Squat to do low areas.
- ◆ Stand on a step-ladder or foot stool to do higher areas.
- ◆ Face the area to be washed.
- ◆ Change posture regularly.
- ◆ Avoid reaching and bending.



### Carrying / Shopping

- ◆ Consider whether you need to carry at all.
- ◆ Use a shopping trolley with wheels that move easily.
- ◆ Place heavier items towards the back of trolley.
- ◆ Avoid twisting your trunk when turning corners. Step around instead.
- ◆ Bend at your knees to reach items stored on low shelves, or when unpacking the trolley.
- ◆ At the checkout, ask the checkout assistant to distribute the weight evenly between several bags.
- ◆ Carry bags of even weight in each hand - to distribute the load evenly.



### Driving / Sitting in a car

- ◆ Sit with your buttocks back as far as possible in seat
- ◆ Position the steering wheel height to prevent shoulder shrugging
- ◆ Stop, stretch and walk around every 1 – 2 hours on a long drive



## SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215

Fax: 3176 7462

## OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641

Fax: 3176 5644

## Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508

Fax: 3176 9514

## Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507

Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)

Fax : 3406 2399

## Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

## Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

## Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

## 6.0 Healthy Lifestyle

The importance of adopting a health lifestyle cannot be emphasised enough.

Most people associate heavy exercise or manual labour with muscle fatigue, soreness and back pain. However, light repetitive activities can have a similar effect on your muscles. Muscle fatigue can lead to problems with a reduction of muscle support around your spine. This can

result in a vicious cycle of postural discomfort and pain, ultimately ending in long term back problems.

Although you may think that the lifting and manual handling you are doing is not very stressful or strenuous for you, you perform these activities all day most days. Because of this, your muscles get tired and the chances of experiencing back pain increases. Activities such as bending, lifting and any twisting (while carrying a load) may cause pain if performed incorrectly, no matter how light.

Consider also how you move from position to position. For example, it is not recommended that you come straight up into a sitting position from lying on your back.

A reasonable level of **fitness** is important for the prevention of injury. Regular physical activity that develops your muscles, keeps you flexible, makes your bones stronger and improves your fitness will make you feel good. Regular cardiovascular exercise will assist with weight control. Any excess weight will increase stress on your back and lower limb joints. Giving priority to regular exercise such as walking, cycling or swimming should be part of your health prevention program, will promote high energy levels, and provide the necessary stress release.



## 7.0 Conclusion

You are the only one who knows if you are feeling comfortable. This makes you the prime caretaker of your own health and manual handling habits. Listen to your body and think about the signals it is sending you. If you feel that you've got a sore back day after day, look at your work and daily habits. Ask yourself 'could I be doing this in a better way?'

Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what you are doing wrong and it may be worthwhile to get some professional help to analyse what is happening.

Only you can change your habits. By learning why you need to change and how to improve your manual handling techniques, you are well on the way to maintaining a pain-free back while providing effective care for all involved.

For more information, contact your local physiotherapist, occupational therapist or other suitably qualified professional.

If you have a query about any of this information, you can contact one of the staff of the Spinal Outreach Team (SPOT) on 07 3406 2300 or email on [spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au).



**SPINAL INJURIES UNIT**

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

**OUTPATIENT  
DEPARTMENT**

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

**Postal and Location**

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

**TRANSITIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
PROGRAM**

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

**Email**

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

**Postal**

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

**Location**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

**SPINAL OUTREACH  
TEAM**

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

**Email**

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

**Postal**

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

**Location**

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

**APPENDIX 1:  
General Stretches**

Below are some general exercises and stretches that may assist you with improving core stability as well as maintaining flexibility. Perform them slowly and smoothly.

**Lower tummy muscle strengthening**

Transversus Abdominus

This muscle provides support to the lower spine, acting as a natural corset to help control your spine when moving and lifting. Activate it in lying, USING ONLY A SMALL EFFORT, by gently drawing in your lower tummy (below the belly button) to your spine. You may get an appreciation of the muscle activating by feeling 2cms below and to the centre of the bony points at the front of your pelvis, as you attempt to draw up your pelvic floor muscles. As you try to activate this muscle, imagine you are stopping the flow of urine. Will trying to activate the muscle continue to breathe. Hold this activation until you feel you are shaking and then relax. Try to repeat at least 10 times in lying before progressing to another position.

Once you are able to activate this muscle easily in lying, try to activate the muscle in other positions such as lifting or moving. Please note: this is a different muscle activation to bracing, straining or holding your breath.

**Pelvic Tilt**

Lie on your back with your hips and knees bent up, feet flat on the lying surface. Flatten your lower back then arch it away from the surface you are lying on. Repeat 10 times, rocking your pelvis back and forth.

**Knee Rolling**

Lie on your back with your hips and knees bent and feet flat on the lying surface. Keep your knees together and rotate them slowly to each side as far as you are able. Repeat 10 times to each side.

**Buttock Stretch**

Lie on your back with your hips and knees bent and feet flat on the lying surface. Pull one knee up onto your chest, using your hands to help with the stretch. Hold for 5 seconds then release. Stretch the other leg.

**Hip stretch**

Sit cross legged on the floor for 2 – 3 minutes per day. Alternate the leg on the bottom. Lean forward in this position to increase this stretch.

**Calf Stretch**



Position yourself in step standing with one leg in front of the other and your hands resting on a wall in front. Lean forwards while keeping your back leg straight, back hip forward and back heel on the ground. Swap legs and repeat.

These exercises and stretches should not cause ongoing pain. If you have any problems with doing any of these exercises, cease doing them and consult your physiotherapist for advice and assessment.

*We wish to express our thanks to the staff of the physiotherapy and occupational therapy staff of the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane for their assistance with this booklet.*

Last Reviewed December 2020  
Review Due December 2022

#### SPINAL INJURIES UNIT

Ph: 3176 2215  
Fax: 3176 7462

#### OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT

Ph: 3176 2641  
Fax: 3176 5644

#### Postal and Location

Princess Alexandra Hospital  
Ipswich Rd  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
AUSTRALIA

#### TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Ph: 3176 9508  
Fax: 3176 9514

#### Email

[trp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:trp@health.qld.gov.au)

#### Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, QLD, 4102

#### Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

#### SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM

Ph: 3176 9507  
Freecall 1800 624 832  
(for regional clients)  
Fax : 3406 2399

#### Email

[spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au)

#### Postal

PO Box 6053  
Buranda, Q, 4102

#### Location

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Centro Buranda  
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd  
Buranda, QLD, 4102  
AUSTRALIA

