



ISR Physical Therapy Newsletter

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A Proactive Approach to Excellence in Health & Rehabilitation

MID BACK PAIN

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When we think of back pain we usually mean low back pain. It is natural to associate any back pain to the low back because lower back pain is so prevalent today. The second most common reason employees miss work is due to problems caused by the lower back. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has stated that four out of five adults will experience significant low back pain sometime during their life. Many however suffer from thoracic or mid to upper back pain. Although it is not as common as low back pain, when thoracic back pain does occur it can cause significant pain and disability.

Thoracic back pain can be the result of a specific injury or accident or due to overuse and strain which may occur with poor posture or work habits. As we spend more time sitting in front of a computer or working while maintaining poor posture we increase our risk of developing upper back, shoulder and neck pain.

Anatomy of the Mid and Upper Back

The thoracic spine is made up of 12 vertebrae. Each of these vertebrae has two attached ribs - one on the right and one on the left. The ribs curve around to the front and form the chest or thoracic cage. The top nine rib pairs attach to the breastbone. The bottom three ribs are called "floating" because they do not have the firm attachment to the breastbone as the upper ribs. This arrangement allows for a relatively rigid structure which protects the organs of the chest. The built in stability of this area of the spine also means there is generally little risk of injury or degeneration to the thoracic spine itself. The major muscles of the shoulders attach to several areas of the mid and upper back including the shoulder blade, ribs and vertebrae of the cervical and thoracic spine. Pain of the mid and upper back is often caused by irritation of these muscles

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Mid and Upper Back Pain

The muscles of the upper back can become irritated if they are weak and deconditioned and forced to perform activities they are not strong enough to do safely. These muscles can also become painful with overuse such as performing repetitive motions or sitting and standing with poor posture for long periods. Thoracic back pain may also be caused by irritation of the small joints that connect the ribs with the vertebrae.

Physical Therapy and Thoracic Pain Treatment

Physical therapy can be beneficial in the treatment of thoracic pain. Therapists can use thermal and electrical modalities to decrease pain and prepare the muscles for activity. Flexibility, strength training and a home exercise program are important components of any therapeutic plan to treat thoracic pain. Certain treatment techniques can also be utilized to increase the mobility of any tight rib - vertebral joints. Trained therapists can also perform an ergonomic analysis of the job site or workstation and can make suggestions which, if followed, may improve posture and reduce the risk of injury.

"No Excuses, Just Results!"

“When I first came to ISR, I could hardly twist, bend or lift anything because of my back pain. I was having extreme difficult walking. After the exercises and education I received I am now pain free!” L

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