

SELF-HELP: PATIENT'S ADVICE

How to take care of your back[☆]

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Recovering from low back pain requires first and foremost that further irritation or injury to the spine is avoided. This will create an environment conducive to healing. The most common source of strain to the low back occurs when bending. It is important to learn to hinge from the hips and knees without bending forward at the waist.

What follows are some examples of correct and incorrect technique when performing common activities of daily life (ADL).

back or neck. The figure here shows with a stick on your back how it is possible to keep the spine upright by hinging from the hips as you bend your knees. In contrast, if you bend at the waist the spine flexes forward putting the low back and neck in potentially harmful positions. This hip hinge will be used during a variety of ADL's to protect the spine (Figs. 1A and B).

The hip hinge

Learning to hinge your trunk from your hips is crucial for avoiding repetitive strain to your lower

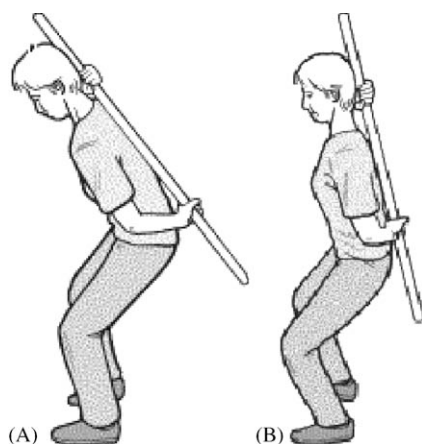


Figure 1 The hip hinge: (A) incorrect—stooping and (B) correct—squatting.

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Getting out of a chair

The key to avoiding strain to your spine when rising from a chair or sitting down is to squat up or down using your hips or knees. Stooping forward from the waist should be avoided. A trick to make this simpler is to scoot towards the edge of your chair so that you are perching and move your feet back under your thighs before sitting up (Figs. 2A and B).

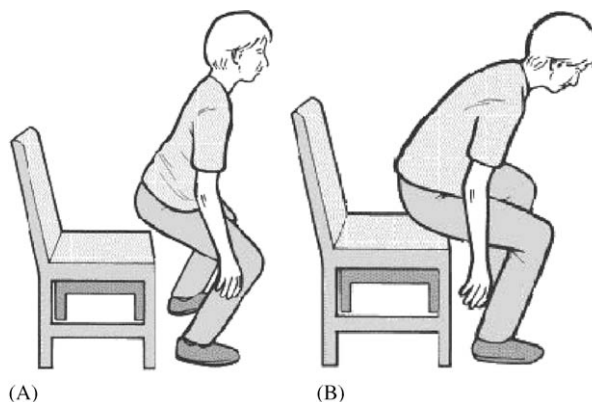


Figure 2 Getting out of chair: (A) correct and (B) incorrect.

Brushing teeth

A foot stool will make it much easier to keep your back upright. Even when you bend forward to rinse your brush or mouth bend from the hips not the waist. A trick to make this simpler is to keep your chest lifted up while you bend forward (Figs. 3A and B).

Driving

A key to back and neck saving posture when driving is to allow the car seat's curve to support your lumbar spine's natural forward curve. A simple trick to encourage this is to increase the lumbar support in the car seat or to sit on small wedge cushion which is higher in the back than the front (Figs. 4A and B).

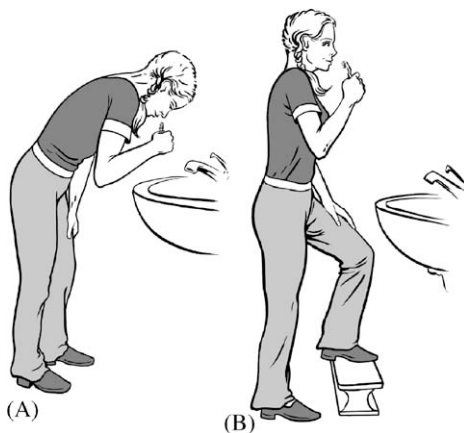


Figure 3 Brushing teeth: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.

Picking up a bag from the floor

Here it is important to bend from the hips and knees while maintaining the low back's natural curve by keeping it curved forward (Figs. 5A and B).

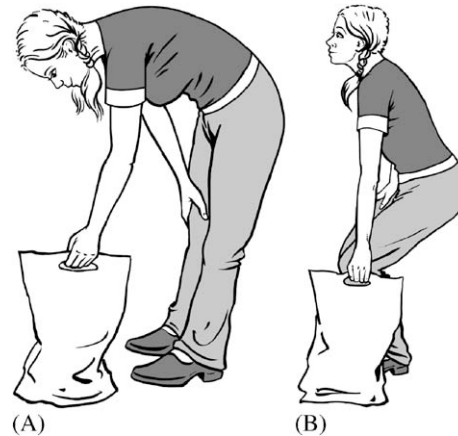


Figure 5 Picking up a bag from the floor: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.

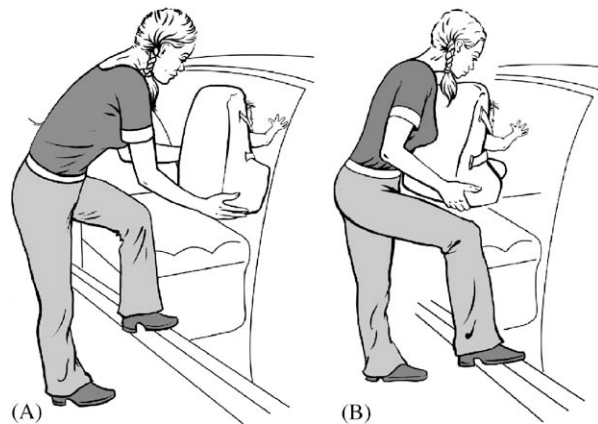


Figure 6 Putting a baby in the car: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.

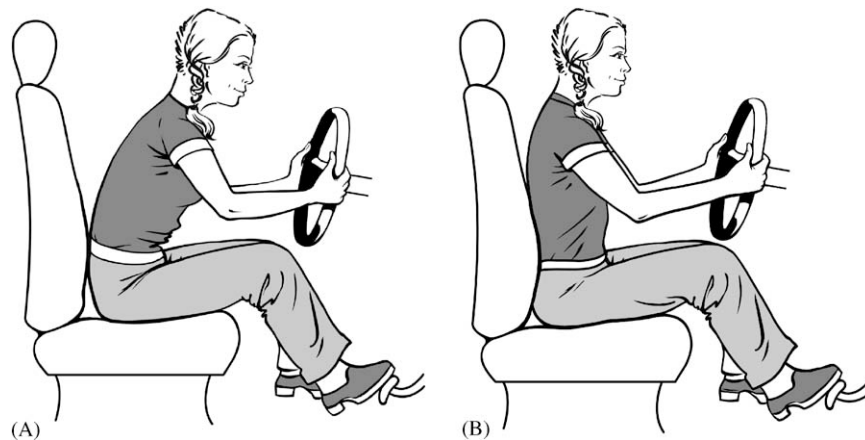


Figure 4 Driving: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.



Figure 7 Changing a baby: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.

Putting a baby in a car

One of the most challenging ADL's involves putting an infant in the back of a car. One tip is to hold the infant as close to your abdomen/chest as possible. Another is to keep your spine upright while avoiding the tendency to bend from the waist (Figs. 6A and B).

Changing a baby

The most important means to avoid harming your back while changing a baby is to ensure that you have a changing station of the appropriate height. If it is too low (below your waist) you will be forced to bend forward from the waist. The correct height is approximately waist high and allows you to

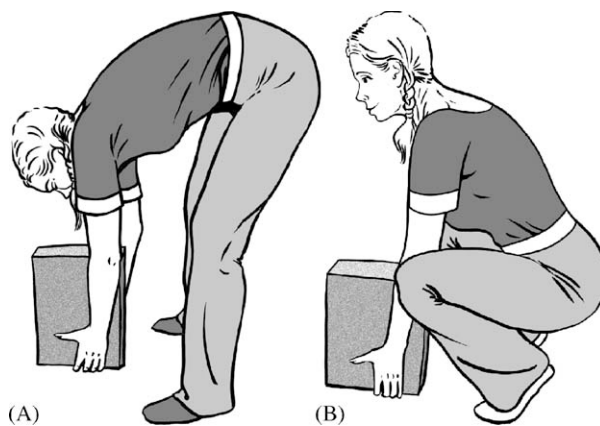


Figure 8 Lifting: (A) incorrect and (B) correct.

manoeuvre your baby without having to bend much (Figs. 7A and B).

Lifting

The most important aspect of lifting is to keep your spine upright by hinging from the hips and knees. Even if the object is awkwardly placed so that it is not directly in front of you the key is to keep your chest lifted in front while maintaining your lumbar spine's natural forward curve. Two other key points which will save you from irritating your back are (1) to avoid lifting during the first half hour of the day, and (2) to avoid lifting immediately after sitting for a prolonged period (i.e. over 40 min) (Figs. 8A and B).

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