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SUFFERING FROM BACK AND NECK PAIN? INVESTING IN TREATMENT PAYS OFF IN THE LONG RUN

Why delaying or forgoing treatment may worsen your condition

PLANO, Texas (March 17, 2009) – Layoffs, loss of insurance, and rising medical costs are forcing people to gamble with their health. According to a recent survey, 25 percent of respondents said they have skipped a doctor’s visit because of cost, while 20 percent of U.S. residents say they have trouble paying medical bills.¹ Delaying visits to the doctor’s office or forgoing preventive care can actually increase the cost of medical care while prolonging pain and recovery time.

Back pain is one of the most common reasons for chronic disability and incapacity for work in the western world, and the second leading reason why Americans see physicians; upper respiratory infections are first. While the problem of back pain is widespread—affecting eight out of 10 adults during their lifetime—early intervention reduces the likelihood of back pain becoming a chronic problem. Furthermore, individuals who delay treatment often see deterioration in their health-related quality of life and psychological well-being, as well as increased physical problems. Therefore, a simple doctor’s visit and following your doctor’s prescribed care can save you hundreds—and sometimes even thousands—of dollars in medical bills.

The question is: How do you know when you should seek a physician’s advice and treatment? Dr. Richard Guyer, a spine surgeon at Texas Back Institute and one of the world’s foremost experts on lumbar spinal conditions, advises you to see your doctor about your back pain if you have:

1. Bowel and bladder problems

¹ “Growing Number of U.S. Residents Delay Medical Care as Economy Worsens,” <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/printerfriendlynews.php?newsid=125801> (October 2008).

If you are having problems controlling your bladder or bowel, you should see a doctor or go to the emergency room immediately.

2. Severe pain that does not improve with rest

If your back pain gets worse or keeps you up at night, it should be investigated. If you have a fever, it could be an infection, and medical care is necessary.

3. Pain after a fall or an injury

Many people walk away from a fall or accident feeling okay. However, pain caused by trauma can be delayed, so it is important to have it checked.

4. Weakness and numbness in your legs

If you experience a sudden onset of weakness or numbness in your legs, you should speak to a doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency department as this may indicate a serious problem. Other causes of weakness or numbness can be spinal stenosis—a condition caused by the narrowing of the spine that can put pressure on your spinal cord or the nerves in your back.

In many cases, individuals will delay treatment, hoping that their back pain and subsequent symptoms will get better. However, forgoing treatment and turning to home remedies as cheaper alternatives often worsen a patient's condition, leading to more costly treatment. Harrell Alexander, a patient of Dr. Guyer, advises those who are experiencing excruciating back pain to listen to doctor's recommendations and, more important, follow their advice. "The longer you put off treatment, the more damage you do," said Harrell Alexander. "I waited too long before my first surgery, which limited my options for treatment."

"It is important to remember that the majority of back pain itself is not harmful and will usually get better in several weeks. However, acute and chronic back and neck pain can be harmful to your health," said Dr. Guyer. "Your health is your most valuable asset. So when in doubt, see your doctor for proper treatment."

About Texas Back Institute

Texas Back Institute, one of the largest freestanding multispecialty spine clinics in the United States, was established in 1977 and provides comprehensive medical care for back and neck pain. Texas Back Institute is a back care leader specializing in spinal arthroplasty, minimally invasive spine surgery, degenerative disk disease and spinal deformation. As an academic health care organization, Texas Back Institute has trained hundreds of physicians, scientists and allied health professionals. Its research institution employs state-of-the-art technology and is involved in many clinical trials, including artificial discs. Texas Back Institute's professional staff includes board-certified spine surgeons, general surgeons, internists, physiatrists, pain specialists, exercise physiologists, and a team of physical and occupational therapists. Texas Back Institute has locations in Dallas, Denton, Fort Worth, Mansfield, McKinney, Plano, Rockwall, Trophy Club and Wichita Falls, Tyler, Odessa, Texas, and Phoenix and Gilbert, Arizona. For more information, visit www.texasback.com.

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