

Suffering is optional?



Back pain, neck pain and knee pain are the most common body pains in Hong Kong. A survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong shows that these problems are particularly severe among women aged 50 or above.

Causes

There are different causes of neck pain. Most often, it is due to excessive wear and tear resulting from repetitive or prolonged neck flexion or poor posture. A study on cervical spine in incremental flexion reveals that as much as 60 pounds would be put on one's neck by tilting the head forward at 60 degrees.

Back pain can be debilitating, affecting up to 80% of population suffering from significant back pain at some point during their life. There are certain factors predisposing for back pain, overweight, poor sitting posture, weak body muscle for keeping good spinal alignment.

Osteoarthritis of the knee is a common cause of knee pain. People who are overweight, have a history of knee joint injuries, or engage in work that requires lifting heavy loads are more

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likely to develop osteoarthritis.

Prevention

Neck and back pains are often associated with poor posture. To prevent and control these pains, one should develop good habits and maintain proper posture. Below are some advices:

- Setting up workstation properly to ensure a correct position is attained;
- Choosing the right pillow and mattress that provide adequate support to your neck and back; and
- Avoiding incorrect posture, such as (i) working with head down for long periods; (ii) napping on chairs or falling asleep with head lying on arm of a couch and (iii) carrying heavy items on one shoulder for a long period.

As mentioned, osteoarthritis of the knee can be a result of overweight, previous knee injuries, or lifting heavy loads on a frequent/continual basis. To minimize these risk factors for knee pain, one may consider taking the following measures:

- Weight reduction - losing 10% body weight can reduce 50% absolute risk of osteoarthritis of the knee (actual result would vary based on individual weight loss ratio);
- Injury prevention – avoiding high impact bodily contact, especially for professional athletes; and
- Post-injury care – seeking professional advice after injury and receiving proper treatment and adequate rehabilitation, which may include appropriate recreational sports activities.

Investigation into the pain symptoms

X-rays and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) are widely used to investigate the sources of pains.

- X-rays can reveal narrowing of the space between two spinal bones, arthritis-like diseases, tumors, slipped discs, narrowing of the spinal canal, fractures and instability of the spinal column.
- MRI is a non-invasive procedure that can identify nerve related issues as well as injuries concerning tendons and ligaments, such as meniscus tear and anterior cruciate ligament injury.

Management of pains

Rehabilitation is the key to pain management and to movement improvement by limiting additional damage and increasing functional ability. Acute pain can usually be managed without special treatment, such as surgery and/or special exercises. Most often, painkilling medication prescribed from doctor helps alleviate the problems. For patients experiencing more severe symptoms or chronic pains, rehabilitation programs may be the more appropriate treatment. The type of program to be implemented is subject to various factors, such as the cause, the type and severity of pain or injury. Most importantly, the patient's active involvement in the rehabilitation is the key to his/her successful recovery.

Other treatments

As mentioned, back pain, neck pain and knee pain are usually treated with less sophisticated means, such as physical therapy, lifestyle modification and prescription medication. In some cases, injection therapy or even surgical treatment may be applied if the pain persists.

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Spine and knee surgeries

Here are two circumstances where a spine or knee surgery may be considered:

- Failure of nonoperative pain management; and
- Persistent nerve root irritation.

Latest technology for spinal surgery

Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery (MISS) – comparing to standard spine surgery, also known as open surgery, MISS is less harmful to the muscles and other tissues near the backbone. Hence, causing less pain, less blood loss and fewer scarring, and allowing faster recovery after surgery.

Latest technology for knee surgery

Knee replacement – it can be performed on either a full or partial basis depending on the severity of the damage to the knee cartilage. During a partial knee replacement, only the damaged part of the knee cartilage is replaced with a prosthesis whereas a total knee replacement involves the entire knee joint.

Advantages of a confined knee replacement

- Preserving anterior and posterior cruciate ligament for better proprioception of knee joint;
- Allowing wider range of motion;
- Preserving healthy tissue and bone in the knee, and allowing better knee function;
- Minimizing blood loss during surgery; and
- Expediting the recovery process.

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