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By Holly Cassandra Corbett, Prevention

Prevention

6 Surprising Pain Triggers

Whether you have chronic pain, throbbing joints, or tension headaches, check out these simple ways to conquer common causes of aches.

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You can't see pain, but when you feel it, it's difficult to think about much else. Mother Nature has good reason for that. "Pain is like the oil light on your car's dashboard: It signals that your body needs attention," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *Real Cause, Real Cure* (Rodale) and *Pain Free 1-2-3, A Proven Program for Eliminating Chronic Pain Now* (McGraw-Hill). "Most doctors prescribe medicines to mask the pain. A better solution is to treat the problem."

Whether you have chronic pain that's lasted for at least 6 months or acute pain from an injury or overuse, you don't have to keep popping pain relievers or suffer through it by toughing it out. Check out these six surprising pain triggers and discover how to fix them to help you stay ache-free.

Pain Trigger #1: Anger

Holding in anger can be a pain in your back, literally. In one study, people with chronic lower-back pain were harassed and then asked to either verbally express their anger or hold it in. Those who kept tight-lipped experienced more tension in the muscles along their spine, according to *Psychosomatic Medicine*. Tight muscles hurt whether you have ongoing back pain or aches from lifting too much, so follow the old adage and blow off some steam.

Avoid Aches: Don't Resist Your Feelings

One trick to minimize pain is to allow yourself to fully feel what you're feeling, says Dr. Teitelbaum. If you try to suppress anger, you'll only store hostile feelings in your muscles as tension and increase the hurt. And focusing your attention on trying to understand or justify feelings shifts you out of your feelings and into your mind so you never really release anger. The next time you see red, pay attention to whether your jaw is tightening or your breathing is getting shallower. These are signs that you're resisting your feelings, so do the opposite and let your jaw go slack or take deep breaths. Find a private place where you can allow yourself to really feel your anger and have a good hissy fit to release your emotions, and ward off tension in your back.

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Pain Trigger #2: Your Smartphone

Your cell may make it easier to stay connected to friends, surf the Web, and pound out quick texts, but it could also be a source of pain. If you hold your cell between your shoulder and your ear so you can multitask when talking, it forces your neck to be held in what is called the "lateral bending position" for long periods of time, says Dr. Teitelbaum. This causes neck and shoulder aches, and even tingling down your arm. Also, texting often can lead to tendonitis in your thumb.



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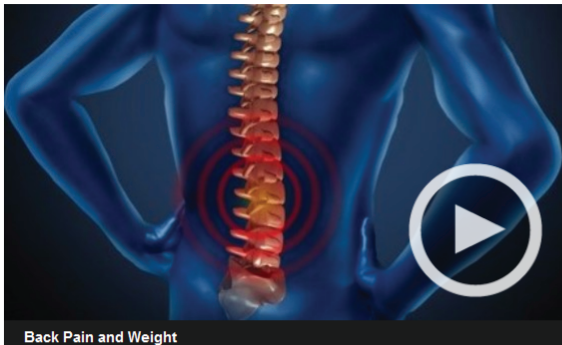
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Avoid Aches: Change Positions

If you're going to be talking for more than a few minutes, use a headset or Bluetooth instead of cradling your cell with your shoulder to avoid a neck-wrenching position. When texting, use the pad of your thumb instead of the tip. "Pressing down with the tip keeps your thumb continuously flexed so you overwork tendons that can trigger pain later on," says Dr. Teitelbaum.

10 Pros With Surprising Pain Solutions

Pain Trigger #3: Thinking the Worst

Catastrophizing, or believing that a situation is much worse than it is, can result in more stress and interfere in one's ability to function well on a day-to-day basis. Multiple studies have linked catastrophizing to a heightened perception of pain. "Emotion and pain are processed in the same area of the brain, so if you're anxious or stressed, it's natural to feel physical pain," says Andrew Bertagnoli, PhD, a member of the board of directors at the American Chronic Pain Association and psychologist in group practice at the Spine Care Medical Group. "That's not to say your pain is emotional; it's just that there's an intersection of the mind and body."

Avoid Aches: Have Daily Worry Time

"Catastrophizing traps us in circular thinking and makes us feel helpless. When we catastrophize, we are focused on our worries rather than on finding solutions," says Nomita Sonty, PhD, associate clinical professor in the division of pain medicine of the anesthesiology department at Columbia University. "This type of thinking makes us feel less in control and increases stress that can result in the worsening of physical pain, such as tension headaches." Dr. Sonty recommends this worry-time technique to keep you from getting stuck in a worry cycle and shift to problem-solving.



Set aside 10 minutes to let yourself worry in the middle of every day (not when you first wake up or before you go to bed). Write down everything you're worried about, from not having enough money in your 401(k) to your neighbor not liking you. Prioritize your worries according to what you can solve today, what you can solve this

week or month, and what you can't change at all. Come up with an action plan for the things that you can change. This switches your focus from ruminating to doing, so you feel more in control. Cross off and then let go of the things that you can't change. If you wake up in the

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morning and start worrying, stop yourself until it's your worry time. This technique trains you to postpone worrying so you don't get caught up in circular thinking and helps to minimize stress and tension.

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