

Oh, my aching back!

By *Monica Hoekstra*

The only “good” thing about low back pain is that it gets our attention: Something isn’t quite right. And the pain can be a great motivator to inspire positive change with long-term benefits.

Nearly 80 percent of Americans suffer from low back pain at some point in their lives. As a health and wellness professional, it is my job to keep up with the latest research on pain management for low back pain. There are no quick fixes and there is no one-type plan that suits everyone, but many people are open to trying a mindful-movement approach and are willing to change the way they view traditional exercise.

First, always have a medical professional evaluate the cause of chronic pain because there could be an underlying issue that is beyond the scope of our practice. Pain management through



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medication and physical therapy is typically the norm for initial treatment. But pain medications are a temporary solution and mask the underlying cause of the pain.

My clients’ No. 1 priority is to discover alternative methods for pain management and the ability to regain a freedom of movement. To start, I firmly believe that evaluating a person’s posture will give a true picture of the health and structure of the joints. Muscular imbalances such as tightness and weakness are usually the culprit of postural deviations, which can put extra stress on the joints and the discs.

The most common disturbance in posture is the tucked-in glutes. The pelvis is pulled forward and the glute muscles (buttocks) are in a constant state of contraction. Visually, you can see that the low back has a flattened appearance, which is not healthy. The low back (lumbar spine) needs to have a normal curve to maintain adequate space between the vertebrae. When that space is compressed, pain and discomfort is usually felt in the lower back.

Because of the loss of that natural curve and the muscular forces pulling the glutes underneath, a trained eye can see

that the body also tends to lean back in a somewhat passive position. This also puts strain on the low back. People with this kind of posture tend to walk stiffly and with limited movement in their hips.

By merely pointing out the deviation, the individual can start to make some conscious and simple changes to align posture and eliminate pain.

Try this exercise:
Sit in a straight back chair. Then curl up the spine up by tightening up the glutes and bringing it forward. You can feel the pressure in the low back and abdomen. You will feel the pressure release as soon as you bring the seat back behind you and sit up tall.

Try the same thing while laying flat on a mat with knees bent and arms by your side. Push the low back into the mat by curling your tail upward. You will feel how you are overworking the seat, which has now caused the hip flexors to shorten and the abdominals to “pooch” forward.

Now release it by feeling the sacrum lying heavy on the mat and keeping the hip flexors and glute muscles relaxed. You should feel as if there is no muscular effort but a sense of length to the low

back, without the pelvis tilting forward or backward. Not only does it give a more flattened appearance to the abdominals but it is also a pelvic position that allows one to activate the deepest layer of muscles in the abdominals that will in turn aid in stabilizing the whole lumbar pelvic region.

Once that posture is correct, a proper strengthening program can be introduced. Properly stretching tight muscles is also key. It will allow for adequate flexibility at each joint.

Freedom of movement is a beautiful thing and allows us to enjoy health and wellness. As our population ages, exercise is no longer a luxury but a necessity to maintain optimal well-being. Continue to move well! ■

Monica Hoekstra is the creator and founder of CORE BARRE™ and studio owner of ABSOLUTE PILATES in Charlotte. Hoekstra is a Lead Instructor Trainer of STOTT PILATES®, a PMA® Certified Pilates Instructor, an ACE® Certified Instructor and an ACE® Educational Provider.

Shooting hoops for a cause

Unlike some of the teams participating in March Madness this year, rebounding is not as easy for some parents whose children are battling life-threatening illnesses. The financial strain of paying hospital bills often presents itself when least expected. The **Hoops Madness for Mitchell’s Fund** event on March 23 raised money to help alleviate the burden put on families that are already living through some of the most difficult days of their lives.

“If you have a child with cancer or with a life-threatening hematological problem and you’re concerned about having hot water in your home – that’s a real problem” said Dr. Randy Hock, a Pediatric Hematologist and Oncologist at the **Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation** in a video produced by Mitchell’s Fund.

Before he was even four months old, Meg McElwain and her husband Frank Turner found out their youngest son, Mitchell, had leukemia. Friends and community members reached out to help.

“We wanted to find a way to channel the desire of our friends and family to help us into a way to help others at Presbyterian Healthcare who are facing challenging pediatric diagnoses,” McElwain said.

More than 200 people were served nachos, barbecue and beers from Olde Mecklenburg Brewery, where the event was held. The event raised \$50,000 for the cause. ■

get involved

**Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation
Hoops Madness for Mitchell’s Fund**
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*Written by Rémy Thurston.
Photos by Bethany Mounts.
More photos at www.societycharlotte.com*



Ann Linde and Meg McElwain



Lauren and Eva James Puckett



Russell and Anne Ranson



Brian Murdock and Scott Herr

Celebrate summer’s arrival with a night **under the stars** at Mint Museum Randolph. Join us for a **spectacular evening!**

PARTY IN THE PARK

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2013 AT 6:30 P.M.

5:30 p.m. Annual Meeting (Members Only)
6:30 p.m. Live Summer Sounds on the Lawn and a Silent Auction benefiting the Mint Annual Fund
Dusk Movie under the stars: “Top Gun” (rated PG)

Pre-register now with your Visa or MasterCard at mintmuseum.org/happenings, or call 704.337.2000. Thank you for your generous contribution to the Mint!

Members: \$10 **Non-Members:** \$20 **Children under 18:** Free

Rain Date: Thursday, June 6



JAZZY LADIES REVIVAL AT THE MINT MUSEUM

Goal is helping teens

Coming from all corners of the state, 200 people attended in the 8th annual **Youth Violence Prevention Conference** on March 15. They listened to keynote speakers, participated in a panel discussion with experts on youth violence and worked in breakout sessions. The conference was held at the UNC Charlotte City Center campus.

This year’s focus was on understanding and preventing self-inflicted youth violence. Conference participants included physicians, social workers, teachers, parents and case managers from community organizations such as CMS Schools, Substance Abuse Prevention Services, Mental Health Association, Carolinas Healthcare and Goodwill Industries.

“The conference was emotionally tough for many,” said Libby Safrit, executive director of Teen Health Connection. “It showed us that we need to continue to build awareness and talk to teenagers so we can prevent more self-inflicted injuries.” Safrit said that by talking to teenagers in a way that relates to them,

we can let them know we are approachable so they will feel comfortable discussing other aspects of their life.

The mission of Teen Health Connection, a supporter and participant in the conference, is to improve the health of adolescents by providing physical and mental health care, education, advocacy and research through connections with teens, parents and the community. ■

get involved

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