

Tools For Life

Fit for Life and Benefits have teamed up to provide health and benefits information monthly.

Copies of this newsletter are available on CouncilInfo and on your union specific and non-represented benefits websites.

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Taking Care of Your Back

What position are you in right now? Are you sitting up straight or slouching? Are your feet planted firmly under you, or are you sitting on one leg or leaning forward? You might not think much about your back—until it starts hurting.

While it's often difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of back pain, lifestyle factors are largely to blame, including

- Poor posture
- Lifting incorrectly
- Sedentary habits
- Obesity
- Tensing up under stress
- Smoking

Taking simple precautions can prevent most cases of back pain. Caring for your back is as easy as modifying the way you do things and

improving your strength and flexibility through a sensible fitness program.

The best way to prevent back pain is to avoid straining your back muscles. You can avoid strain by stretching and strengthening the muscles and using proper posture and lifting techniques.



Having good posture is a key to preventing back pain. Proper posture means correctly positioning your body all the time. Sitting, exercis-

ing, working, and doing chores, even sleeping, require good posture to prevent back injury and pain.

Your lower back supports most of your body weight, making it prone to injury. By improving the strength and flexibility of supporting muscles, you can help reduce back strain. Strong abdominal muscles and lower back muscles, combined with strong and flexible lower body muscles (quadriceps, hamstrings and hip flexors), will help take the pressure off your back.

Maintaining Good Posture

Your back is healthiest and most stable when it's in a neutral position, which means that your spine's three natural curves are aligned properly. Think of your vertebrae as stacked blocks: If one block is misaligned, the entire stack is affected, and your muscles and ligaments must work harder to support you. Keep-

ing your vertebrae aligned reduces stress on the muscles, ligaments, bones, and joints in your back. Here are some tips for maintaining proper posture when

- **Standing:** Standing for long periods of time can put pressure on back joints. Shift your weight often, or place one foot on a footrest or

stool. Stretch or move around at least once every half hour.

- **Sitting:** If your job requires sitting for long periods, make sure you have an ergonomically designed chair or one that provides proper back support. If you don't, roll up a towel and place it behind your

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“Many people are used to bad posture, good posture may not always feel right”



Maintaining Good Posture– Continued

lower back to provide support. Avoid slouching. Sit upright with your buttocks against the chair. Your knees should be level with your hips. If your feet dangle, use a footstool. Items at your work space should be within easy reach to prevent twisting and overextending. Take several breaks throughout the day to walk around and stretch.

- **Driving:** Adjust the seat or place a towel behind your back so that your back is supported. You shouldn't have to stretch or lean forward. Adjust the headrest so it supports the middle of your head. On long trips, stop occasionally to stretch your legs and give your back a break.

- **Sleeping:** Use a supportive mattress and avoid sleeping on your stomach, which places too much pressure on your lower back. If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your knees. The pillow under your head should fill in the space between the bed and your neck to help keep your neck horizontal. If you're a back sleeper, place a small pillow under your knees and make sure your neck is supported properly. Avoid sleeping with your arms above your head, which puts stress on your shoulders and neck.

How do I know if I have good posture?

Because many people are so used to bad posture, good posture may not always feel right. Paying attention to your posture in everything you do will help. Here are some things you can do to check your posture:

- Stand against a wall. Your head, shoulder blades, buttocks and heels should all touch the wall, and your lower back should be close to the wall. If your head's not touching the wall, straighten your shoulders. If your lower back is far from the wall (known as *sway back*), tighten your abs and tilt your pelvis so that it's closer to the wall.
- Check yourself in a mirror or ask someone to check your posture while standing. From the side your ear, shoulder, hip, knee and the front of your ankle should all form a vertical line. Completely slouch in your chair. Now, stick out your chest and sit up completely straight, overarching your back. Relax this position slightly, until you feel you're sitting straight up, comfortably, with your back supported by the chair. This is the posture you should maintain while sitting.

Lifting

Lifting things incorrectly can

injure your back. When you're lifting something, be sure to use your legs and stomach muscles, not your back.

To lift objects properly

- Take your time and prepare your body to lift with proper form.
- Stand close to the object you want to lift.
- Place your feet shoulder width apart, with your toes turned slightly out. You may want to put one foot slightly in front of the other.
- Bend at the knees (not the waist) to lower yourself toward the ground, keeping your back straight.
- Grab the object firmly and bring it as close to your body as possible.
- Lift the item by straightening your legs, keeping your back as straight as possible. Tighten your stomach muscles as you lift. Do not twist or turn while lifting.
- Lift objects only chest high unless they're very light. Get help when lifting heavy objects.

For more information see the DOR website at www.doreap.com. Click here for stretch exercises <http://councilinfo/hr/FFL/documents/Stretches.pdf>.

HealthPartners Benefits for Back Care

The medical benefits under all of our health plans (Open Access, Empower HRA and Distinctions III) include benefits for office visits, medically necessary chiropractic care and physical therapy ordered

by a physician. Please see your HealthPartners Group Membership Contract by signing on your personal HealthPartners account through our website: <http://www.healthpartners.com/>

metropolitancouncil/ and clicking on the medical plan services tab. Or, you can call HealthPartners customer service at (952) 883-5000.

Strengthen your Core with HealthPartners Frequent Fitness Program

HealthPartners' Frequent Fitness program offers a \$20 reimbursement on your monthly club fees for working out 12 times per month at participating health clubs.

HealthPartners also offers discounts on health club memberships through GlobalFit. For more information on these HealthPartners programs, go to <http://www.healthpartners.com/files/53630.pdf>.



**Get \$20
reimbursement
on your
monthly club
fees**

HealthPartners viruwel Clinic

HealthPartners has introduced an online clinic which provides diagnosis and treatment of more than 30 common medical conditions. The service combines proven medical expertise with the convenience of 24/7 online access to care – including prescriptions if needed. Experienced nurse practitioners are available day and night to treat adults and children for conditions such as cold, cough and allergy, sinus infections, ear pain, yeast and urinary tract infections and acne. And, it's easy to use:

1. Visit virtuwel.com. Use it for yourself or your children.
2. Take a quick online interview.
3. Get Treatment Plan notification via email or text from a nurse practitioner.
4. Pick up a prescription at your preferred pharmacy (if needed) and start feeling better!

The service is available to all living in, working in or traveling to Wisconsin or Minnesota. No appointment is necessary and patients do not

need to be a HealthPartners health plan member to use viruwel.

If consumers decide to use their insurance, it will process at the convenience care benefit (if applicable) or the office visit benefit. It costs just \$40 or the copay/coinsurance amount and satisfaction is guaranteed. viruwel is in the HealthPartners network as a convenience care provider. To see the conditions treated by viruwel or to try it out yourself, visit virtuwel.com.



Flex Balances Via Text

Have you ever stood in a pharmacy or doctors office and wondered if you had enough of a flex balance to use your debit card to pay your copay or coinsurance? Now you can receive your flex (FSA) balance by text.

Simply log on to MyTASC at www.tasconline.com, using the TASC Login ID and TASC PIN that was sent to you in December. Click on *profile*, enter or update your mobile phone number, click "save" and you're all set.

Next time you are at that pharmacy and don't know what your balance is, text TASC BAL to number 41411, and get an instant reply. Standard text messaging rates apply.

Within your TASConline account profile page, you can also set it to send you certain notifications by text or email. Simply verify your email or mobile number at the bottom of the screen, enter the verification code you are sent, and then click

the boxes to indicate the information you desire to be sent to you by email or text.



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We're on the WEB!

Tools For Life

The Metropolitan Council offers benefits to over 3500 full and part time, union and non-union employees. Emphasis is given to the education and communication of those benefits. We offer information online and through our Benefits-One line (651-602-1601), as well as during special benefit meetings and annual benefits fairs.

The Metropolitan Council's employees are a key to our agency's success. In order to attract and retain high quality employees, the Council provides a highly competitive benefits package both in choice and coverage levels. All benefits programs are developed to comply with applicable laws, regulations, policies and labor agreements.

HealthPartners Member ID Cards from your Smartphone

New HealthPartners Identification cards are sent to you each year you are enrolled in a HealthPartners plan, but what if you get to your doctor's office and realize you don't have it with you? Go to m.healthpartners.com on your smart phone to see an exact image of your Health-

Partners ID card. If your doctor needs a copy, you can fax it their office right from your phone.

