

# Back brochure

Patient information leaflet





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Dear patient,

Welcome to the UZA's physical medicine department.

How can you perform your daily activities in a back-friendly manner? During the 'back-friendliness in practice' info session we will go over the ergonomic positions to prevent further back problems.

In this brochure we have listed all tips. If you have any questions, feel free to ask your physician, physiotherapist or occupational therapist.



## 1. Basic principles

We use our backs and necks in just about all our activities.

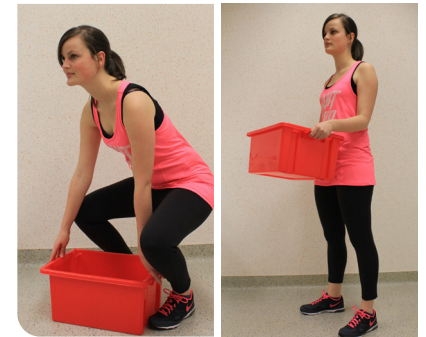
By applying the following basic principles, your back and neck will be burdened as correctly as possible.

- Do not bend forward and do not rotate your back.
- Work close to your body.
- Do not work above shoulder height.
- Do not do any static muscular work, use dynamic muscular work as much as possible.
- Avoid activities that cause shocks.

## 2. Lifting techniques

It is best to lift as little as possible. If you do need to lift something, do it correctly.

- Prepare lifting work.
- Increase the base of support.
- Maintain the natural curvature of your back.
- Keep the load close to your body.
- Distribute the load as symmetrically as possible.
- Do not rotate your back.
- Use your legs for lifting: bend your knees and hips, not your back.
- Pick up light objects with the golfer movement, possibly with an additional support point.
- Use devices to lift heavy objects, or lift with two persons.
- Use your breathing to lift heavy objects.
- Pushing is allowed, avoid pulling.
- Push from your legs as much as possible.



*Golfer movement*

### 3. Lying

Both the sleeping system and the sleeping position have an influence on your sleep quality. They play a major role in keeping your back healthy and in reducing pain.

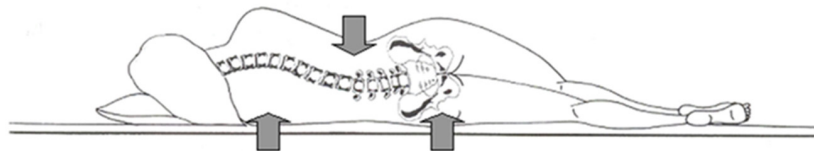
#### 3.1 Sleeping system

The sleeping system consists of three components: bed base, mattress and pillow. These should be matched. The motility of the bed base is important.

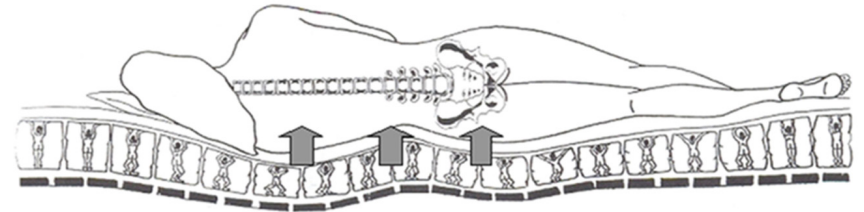
- An appropriate bed base and mattress are necessary for a good night's rest. Take the hardness of the mattress into consideration:
  - A mattress that is too soft will not provide sufficient support, as a result of which the natural back curves cannot be maintained. The spinal column will bend.



- A mattress that is too hard will flatten the back, as a result of which the back curves cannot be maintained.



- When lying on your side, the spinal column must form a horizontal line.



- Use a pillow that properly supports your neck. Do not lie with your shoulders on the pillow.



#### 3.2 Sleeping position

- If you sleep on your back, put a small pillow under your knees for a proper pelvic tilt.
- If you sleep on your side, pull up both legs. Possibly place a pillow between your knees.



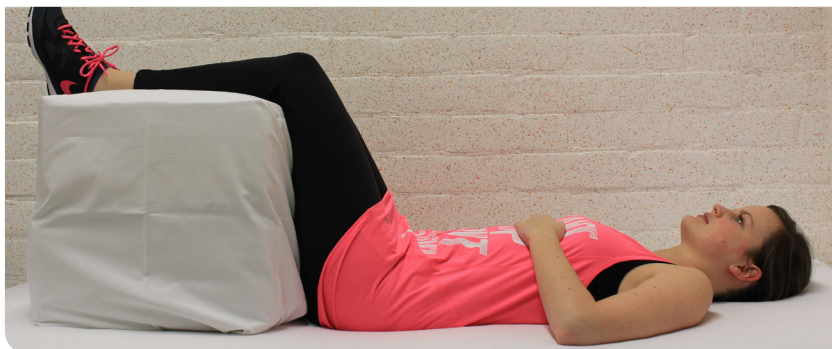
- When lying on your side, you can also stretch your bottom leg; your top leg is bent a bit more and must rest on a pillow.



- Another correct lying position is to bend your bottom leg and stretch your top leg. A pillow is not required because your bottom leg prevents rotation.
- Lying on your belly is not recommended because it causes an exaggerated back curvature and neck rotation. If necessary, place a small pillow under your belly.



- The most relaxed position for your back is the so-called 'psoas position', lying on your back. The knees and hips are bent at a 90° angle. Both lower legs rest on a pillow. Your feet need to be supported as well.



## 4. Sitting

**By taking the 'two golden rules of sitting' into account, you can already avoid many issues.**

- Sit dynamically: regularly change your position to avoid static muscle strain; in other words, sitting is resitting.
- Sit at an open angle: the angle in your hips should be greater than 90°.



Open angle

Correct sitting position

Resting position

### 4.1 Resting position

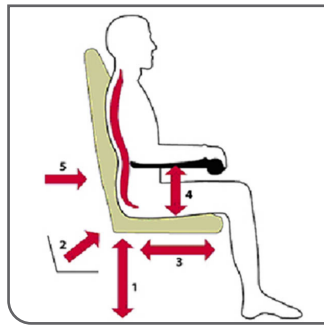
**In the resting position your entire back and shoulder line should be supported. You can also use neck support.**

- Your feet should be properly supported, possibly use a footrest.
- Your knee pit should remain free, to avoid pinching of nerves and blood vessels.
- Let your arms rest on the armrests.
- Provide lower back support (lumbar support) and possibly neck support.
- The backrest can tilt, so that you can lean back a bit.
- The backrest can support the shoulder line.
- Possibly use a sitting wedge in combination with lumbar support.

## 4.2 Working position

attention to the adjustment of your office chair, your office furnishing and your position while working. Possibly use devices.

### 4.2.1 Chair



Use an adjustable office chair

Pay attention to the following aspects:

1. Sitting height
2. Open angle
3. Sitting depth
4. Armrests
5. Backrest with lumbar support

- Adjust the **sitting height** to ensure an open angle.
- Your feet should be flat on the floor, possibly use a footrest.
- **Sitting depth:** two thirds of the upper legs should be supported by the seat. The knee pit should remain free, to avoid pinching of nerves and blood vessels.
- **Backrest:** two thirds of the back should be supported. Use lumbar support so that the 'lumbar lordosis' is supported.
- **Armrests:** the elbows rest at a 90° angle on short armrests with relaxed shoulders. The armrests should be in line with the tabletop. In other words, the tabletop is at elbow height. Adjust the armrests so that the elbows can be kept close to the body.
- Use the chair's dynamics to sit dynamically and adjust the resistance of the tilting mechanism to your body weight.
- To change your position regularly, you can also work **standing up**.
- When **reading**, it can be useful to tilt the tabletop 45°. A 30° tilt suffices when writing.

### 4.2.2 Workstation

Pay attention to the following when arranging your workstation:

- Ensure sufficient space, both on and under the tabletop.
- Sit right in front of your keyboard, document holder and screen.
- The top edge of the screen should be on the horizontal eye line. Make sure that the screen is at the optimal viewing angle. The viewing distance is 50 to 70 cm.
- Choose the correct position of the screen in relation to the window to avoid reflections.
- The mouse is next to the keyboard. Do not grip the mouse in your hands to avoid static muscle strain.
- The keyboard is at 10 to 15 cm from the table's edge and the hands rest on it in a neutral position.

### 4.2.3 Position

Pay attention to your working position:

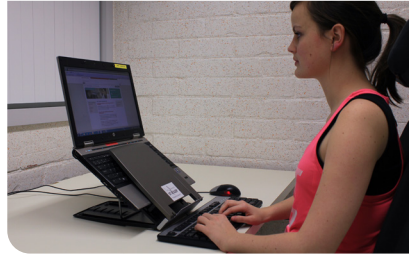
- Keep your head straight as much as possible. Try to limit static muscular work.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Let your forearms rest on the armrests.
- When using a mouse, keep your forearm as close as possible to your body and move the mouse from your arm, NOT from the wrist.
- Place your feet flat on the floor to avoid dangling legs.



#### 4.2.4 Devices



Document holder



Laptop holder with separate keyboard and mouse



Inclined tabletop for writing



Height-adjustable footrest

## 5. Standing

Many activities are performed standing up. It is important to tilt your pelvis regularly. For instance, you can:

- Place one foot on a stool.
- Alternately place a foot forward.
- Use a 'standing chair' to alleviate standing work.
- Place your back against the wall and slightly bend your legs, so that your back is partially relieved.

Depending on the job being carried out, adjust the working height of the tabletop.



WRONG

RIGHT

Some guidelines for the correct working height:

Working height guidelines	
Meticulous manual jobs	Elbow height + 5 to 10 cm
Moderate strength and precision	Elbow height -5 to 10 cm
Heavy objects, downward pressure	Elbow height -10 to 25 cm
Lifting and carrying	Between fist and elbow height
Control buttons	Between elbows and shoulders

## 6. Daily activities

### 6.1 Washing

When washing yourself while standing at a washbasin, you can use your leg or hand to find support on the washbasin. Do not lean forward, but bend the knees.

Place your foot on your upper leg when washing your foot or when clipping your nails while sitting.

If you have difficulty in getting in and out of the bathtub, use a bath shelf.



### 6.2 Getting dressed

It is best to take off your socks and shoes while sitting, place your foot on your upper leg. If you put on your socks and shoes while standing, place your back against the wall.

If this is still too difficult, use a sock aid and a long shoehorn, allowing you to sit without leaning forward.

### 6.3 Household activities

#### 6.3.1 Kitchen activities

- Place things that you use daily within easy reach, to bend over or reach as little as possible.
- Put heavy objects in low places and light objects in high places. Possibly use a kitchen step.
- Avoid rotations when taking something from the cupboard.
- When cooking and doing the dishes, you can use a third support point to relieve your back.
- Possibly place 1 foot up in a cupboard or on a stool, thus tilting your pelvis.
- Separate your legs, giving yourself a broader base of support.
- If standing for prolonged periods is a burden, you can use a standing chair, ironing chair or barstool, allowing you to work at the counter while sitting.
- Lean with your hand on the table when cleaning it (third support point).



#### 6.3.2 Washing

When washing, a good organisation is important. Take the following into account:

- Kneel in front of the washing machine when loading and unloading it.
- Place the laundry basket at an appropriate height next to your leg.
- Do not rotate your torso when putting the laundry in the basket.
- Possibly work with one hand, place your other hand on the machine for support (third support point).
- Use a drying rack. Avoid using a high clothesline.
- Put one foot up while ironing or use an ironing chair.



### 6.3.3 Cleaning

Also when cleaning there are several devices that help relieve your back.

- Only use brooms with long handles (shoulder height) so that you can keep your back straight.
- Do not bend forward, but use your legs while cleaning and move your feet.
- Keep your cleaning supplies near, to avoid bending forward.
- Possibly use handgrips.
- Avoid back rotations.



WRONG

RIGHT

Handgrips

- Place your bucket on a chair, to avoid bending forward.
- Use a long-handled brush and dustpan.
- Place one hand on the farthest edge of the bathtub for support, when cleaning the bathtub. You can also stand in the bathtub.



### 6.3.4 Making your bed

Find a third support point to make your bed, distributing the force over several support points. Place one hand on the bed, or lean against the bed with your legs. Do not fluff the duvet, possibly use clothes pegs or make the bed with two persons.



### 6.4 Childcare

- Put a baby on a nursing table of sufficient height, so that you do not have to bend over.
- Put the child on a chair or step, so that you do not have to bend over.
- Possibly kneel on one knee to close a coat.

### 6.5 Gardening

- Use long-handled gardening tools (shoulder height).
- Possibly install handgrips on the handle.
- Kneel when you need to work close to the ground.
- Use a third support point.
- Avoid rotations.

## 7. Notes

# Contact

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*This brochure contains general information and is intended to complement the talk with your healthcare professional.*

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