

A SIMPLE GUIDE

To Healthy Living

JAN-MAR 2019 ISSUE 59

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**GROWING OLD
WITH BROKEN BONES**
Understand what spine
fractures mean for the elderly

**FALLS: GET UP
OR GET HELP**
How not to injure
yourself further

**WHEN BACK PAIN
HURTS YOUR BODY
AND SOUL**
Learn how to maintain
your pain emotionally

SPINE FRACTURES IN THE ELDERLY AND WHY THIS MATTERS

AUTHOR **DR LOO WEE LIM**, Orthopaedic Surgery Consultant, Changi General Hospital



WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BONES WHEN WE GET OLDER? WELL, YOU'VE HEARD OF OSTEOPOROSIS, BUT DOES IT HAPPEN TO OUR SPINE, OUR BODY'S CENTRAL SUPPORT? YES IT DOES, AND DR LOO WEE LIM EXPLAINS WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT.

As Singapore's population ages, osteoporosis is fast becoming a major public health issue. Epidemiological studies have shown that 4 in 10 women (aged 50) will experience a hip, spinal or distal radius fracture in their remaining lifetime. Hip and spinal vertebral fractures can cause loss of mobility, depression, chronic pain and increased rates of death.

As we get older, our vertebrae weaken and become flatter. This can make elderly patients shorter and lead to a rounded back (dowager's hump) to the spine. Furthermore, osteoporotic fractures in the elderly spine can cause a variety of problems ranging from chronic pain, deformity to loss of urinary and bowel control. Most of these fractures can occur after a low-energy fall, such as that from a standing height.

The pain experienced is most commonly just above the waistline at the back. It often gets worse with motion, cough and sneezing. Rest or lying down typically provides some relief. This problem can be detected via a neurological examination looking for numbness, weakness and changes in reflexes. Often, it is accompanied with an X-ray.



Understanding spinal fractures

Spinal fractures can be classified into stable and unstable fractures. Stable compression fractures can be managed conservatively with rest, analgesia and physiotherapy. Support belts and corsets can be used to aid movements as well. Filling up the fractured bone with bone cement is another form of treatment that can reduce pain too.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI scans) are used to determine the stability of the spine. The scan will reveal any compression of the spinal cord or nerves or joint disruption. If needed, screws and rods may be inserted to enhance stability, which will prevent chronic pain and reduce the chances of kyphotic deformity (hunchback). In cases of nerve compression, surgery may be performed to prevent further injury to the nerves that supply the lower limbs, bladder and bowels.

Know your prevention and treatment options

The elderly commonly suffer from effects of spinal fractures, causing great distress in their quality of life. However, the problem can be managed if treated early. Physiotherapy or minimally-invasive surgeries can reduce the great deal of pain that fractures cause, and can prevent further stress to other areas in the body. Seek advice from your doctor today to find out more, and you might be headed towards a path of less pain!

A NEW YEAR, A FRESH START!

AUTHOR DR LINSEY UTAMI GANI, ECHO Programme Director



Dear Readers,

Welcome into 2019! I trust that you've had an enjoyable holiday season with family and friends. The new year brings the opportunity for change and we from ECHO are excited to share about some new changes that will be starting this year.

We begin the year with a common issue that we all encounter as we age – 'back pain'. For those of us who have experienced back pain, we remember the excruciating sensation and debilitation that back pain can bring. Especially if it's not just simple back pain, but pain associated with chronic diseases such as osteoporosis. This is a condition that causes bones to weaken, predisposing one to getting fractures in the back. With age, especially in post-menopausal women, the risk of osteoporosis rises with time. In this issue, we have Dr Loo Wee Lim, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, to share some facts about spine fractures and what we can do to prevent and even treat this condition. We also have our clinical psychologist to give us an insight on the emotional aspect of back pain and what we can do to deal with it. Our physiotherapist also will give us some tips on how to deal with falls and how to get up, or get help safely. Ageing well is our hope for everyone in the community and in ECHO we hope to be able to support this goal.

Starting June 2019, *A Simple Guide* will be combined with the Changi General Hospital's bi-monthly *Caring* magazine. Distribution to your mailboxes will cease, but *Caring* magazine will be available in community centres and during health screenings and result collections. You can also access the content online, via www.echohealth.com.sg. We look forward to providing you with health information and contents that will help keep you informed on living well and healthily.

Lastly, our first health screening in Marine Parade begins in March 2019. Please walk-in to register at Joo Chiat CC or your nearest RC in Marine Parade as invitations will not be sent out by post. We look forward to meeting everyone in the East again this year as we embark on another year of sowing seeds to a better health!

YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THIS CONDITION

AUTHOR DR TAN TZE CHONG JUSTIN, Family Physician



Dr Tan Tze Chong Justin is a family physician practicing at a GP Clinic in Fengshan Bedok. When he is not working, he is busy looking after a demanding three-year-old with atopic dermatitis.



If you come down with a red, itchy rash, it could possibly be allergic contact dermatitis. This rash isn't contagious or life-threatening, although it can be very uncomfortable. This is caused by a contact with a substance that triggered an allergic reaction, and normally can be subdued with an appropriate topical or oral agent that can be prescribed for by your GP.

Very commonly, the likely culprit is nickel, which is present in a lot of metallic jewellery like necklaces, earrings and belt buckles. Your GP can manage



such conditions and diagnosis is relatively straightforward as it is related to direct skin contact with the offending agent. The most important aspect of treatment would be to remove the offending agent; which in this case could be a piece of jewellery. A topical corticosteroid cream with either topical or oral antibiotic cover

usually produces good results. In order to speed up recovery, a hypoallergenic moisturiser can be applied to soothe the skin. Sometimes an oral anti-histamine would be necessary to manage the itch that accompanies such a condition.

This condition can be managed yourself too. Choose jewellery without a nickel component, such as pure gold or silver. Avoid metallic belt buckles and choose plastic ones instead. If an allergic reaction develops, seek treatment early to minimise the risk of complications. Take note of the type of soaps, fragrances and cosmetics that you are using too. Allergic contact dermatitis is only one aspect of atopy. If you are allergic to nickel, it is possible that you might be allergic to other commonly used substances around you. This can manifest in other ways, such as a cough, a runny nose or teary eyes. See a GP early as they are likely to be able to help you identify the offending agent as well as offer treatment.

It is good to note that allergies do not usually start straight away. You must be exposed to the offending agent prior to the onset of symptoms. Sometimes it might be necessary to look back days or weeks to identify the offending agent. Understanding what you are allergic saves you a lot of trouble and distress!



Back Pain: Managing your Emotions

AUTHOR MICHELLE TAN, Clinical Psychologist, Health Wellness Programme, Changi General Hospital



MANY OF US HAVE LONG-TERM BACK PAIN THAT DOES NOT JUST IMPACT US PHYSICALLY BUT EMOTIONALLY. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST MICHELLE TAN TELLS US HOW WE CAN DEAL WITH IT.

Pain. Why do we experience it?

Pain is never a pleasant sensation, and rightly so – it functions to alert us to injury, limits our activity so we do not further injure ourselves, and teach us what not to do in the future. If it wasn't for pain, we would still be poking our fingers into electric sockets. Pain is intimately linked with negative emotions, and its aversive nature is what makes it so good at protecting our health.

However, when pain goes on for a long time its partnership with our bad feelings can be less useful. People with long-term back pain may feel frustrated or helpless when it interferes with their daily activities. They may also worry over injuring themselves further and thus restricting their activities. While not aggravating the injury is good, resting excessively can weaken muscles and delay recovery.

Frustration and anxiety can also heighten pain perception. Stress leads to muscle tension as well, which is often associated with increased pain. Negative emotions and pain can thus intensify each other in a vicious cycle. How then can we get out of this entrapment?

Healing both the mind and body

Given the close connection between the body and mind in relation to pain, it makes sense to take good care of both when recovering from a back injury.

Adherence to a physical therapy regime can promote feelings of confidence that kickstart a positive spiral. Your doctor may refer you to a physiotherapist who will work with you to strengthen the muscles in your back and core, and teach you how to do everyday activities without hurting your back. Your doctor and physiotherapist can also help you determine the right amount of activity to help you balance regaining function and preventing aggravation of your injury. Gaining knowledge and experiencing improvements can reduce anxiety, frustration and helplessness.

Taking care of your emotions is also important. Practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing can help you cope with anxiety and ease the muscle tension that contributes to your back pain. A simple technique is closing your eyes and imagining a place in which you feel safe and comfortable. Try to imagine not just what you see,

but also what you hear, smell, touch and taste. Finally, you can ask your physiotherapist about how you can practice a relaxation method called progressive muscle relaxation in a safe way.

Give yourself time

Sometimes we can have unrealistic expectations about our capacity to recover or to work while injured. This can lead to stress, frustration and increased pain perception, or even aggravation of injury if we push ourselves too hard. We can also feel guilty if we think we are burdening others who may be inconvenienced by our injury. Check in with yourself periodically to see if you are having such thoughts. If you find yourself thinking this way, gently remind yourself that even if you are not functioning optimally now, you will probably recover faster if you took some time to rest and relax. The key thing to remember is to be patient with yourself and your body. Talking to friends and family who can offer perspective and encouragement may also help.

Remember, any sort of stress may contribute to muscle tension, so pay attention to stresses from work, relationships or elsewhere. Try to maintain a relaxed and balanced lifestyle during your recovery – scheduling enough downtime for hobbies and loved ones is vital. If you have a spiritual practice and community, leaning on them can help you through. In some cases, your doctor may refer you to a psychologist for further help in managing your feelings.

As back pain and our emotions are so intertwined, it can be difficult to find our way out when we get stuck in a negative spiral. Nonetheless, with the appropriate interventions and with professional help, you can succeed in both your physical and emotional recovery.

GET UP OR GET HELP



AUTHOR **TOH XI EN**, Physiotherapist,
Changi General Hospital

APPROXIMATELY ONE-THIRD OF OLDER ADULTS AGED 65 YEARS AND ABOVE FALL DOWN EACH YEAR. IF YOU HAVE FALLEN DOWN, HOW DO YOU GET UP PROPERLY WITHOUT INJURING YOURSELF FURTHER? WE HAVE LISTED OUT SOME GUIDELINES.

Falls can bring about many complications such as fractures, long-term hospitalisation, loss of self-esteem and fear of falling. It is important for an older adult to get up or get help as soon as possible after a fall because lying on the floor for a long time can lead to more problems such as skin breakdown (often worsened by unavoidable incontinence), muscle breakdown, dehydration, lung infection, and even death.

Follow these steps if you are alone and unable to get up when you fall down:

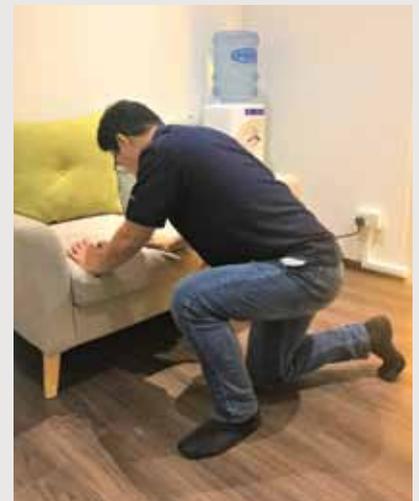


1. DO NOT PANIC!

- Start by moving your body and all limbs.
- If you feel pain and are unable to move or get up from floor, call for help. Sit or lie down on the floor in a comfortable position until help arrives.
- If you have no pain, roll on your side and get into a sitting position.



2. Get on all fours and move/ crawl towards a nearby support that is firm and steady.



3. Lift one knee and use your supporting foot and arms to push yourself up.



4. Push yourself up and slowly turn yourself around to sit down.



5. Rest until you feel strong enough to stand up. Seek medical help if needed.



Home Recipes

AUTHOR BRYAN TAN, Sous Chef, Dietetic & Food Services,
Changi General Hospital



EASY LEMON BUTTER FISH

PREP TIME: 7 MINS
COOK TIME: 12 MINS
TOTAL TIME: 19 MINS
YIELD: 4

RECIPE ANALYSIS (PER SERVE):

	Per Serving
Calories (kcal)	148
Carbohydrate (g)	1.4
Protein (g)	19.3
Fat (g)	7.4
Cholesterol (mg)	6.4
Fibre (g)	0.4
Sodium (mg)	260

INGREDIENTS

4 x 100g dory fish fillets, about 1-inch thickness
 ½ teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon paprika
 ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 5g garlic clove, peeled and finely chopped
 5g shallot, peeled and finely chopped
 2 tablespoons melted butter
 Juice and zest from 1 medium lemon

Garnish:

Freshly chopped basil or parsley leaves, for garnish and flavour
 Extra lemon slices for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

- To make the seasoning mixture, stir together ¼ teaspoon salt, paprika and black pepper in a small bowl. Press seasoning mixture on both sides of fish fillet and set aside.
- Heat 2 teaspoons of olive oil in a medium pan. Pan-fry fish fillets on both sides over medium heat until cooked through. Remove from pan and set aside.
- To make the lemon butter sauce, sauté chopped garlic and shallot in 1 teaspoon olive oil over low heat. Add butter, lemon juice and zest and ¼ teaspoon salt. Stir to mix well.
- To serve, place fish on a plate, spoon over lemon butter sauce and garnish with chopped basil or parsley leaves and lemon slices.

SHARE YOUR RECIPES!



Send in the recipes of your home-cooked food to the ECHO team! Our Dietitian from Changi General Hospital will review and provide suggestions to make it better and healthier and share the recipes in A Simple Guide!

Guidelines for recipe submission

- The recipes should include ingredients and methods
- All ingredients should have a unit of measurement (e.g. 1 teaspoon oil, 150g skinless chicken fillet)
- Each recipe should indicate how many people the dish serves
- The cooking equipment used to cook the dish should be mentioned (e.g. pot, non-stick pan, wok)



2019 ECHO HEALTH SCREENING

The ECHO health screenings in Marine Parade is happening! **SPREAD THE NEWS!** If you have family members, friends or relatives residing in the following constituency, please encourage them to register for the ECHO health screening!

Note: You will no longer be receiving invitation letters by post. If you need to change your mailing address, please email to ECHO@cgh.com.sg or contact our ECHO coordinators during office hours.

HOW TO REGISTER?

Register in-person @ Joo Chiat CC or the nearest RC in located in Marine Parade when registration starts. Bring along your NRIC, together with your cash payment to register.

Screening Venue	Health Screening Date	Registration Start Date
Marine Parade CC	9 Mar 2019 (Sat)	8 Jan 2019

MERGING WITH CARING MAGAZINE

ECHO's quarterly newsletter "A Simple Guide" will be merging with *Caring Magazine* starting from 1 July 2019!

Caring magazines will be distributed at ECHO health screening sites and various community clubs and centres. Posting out of newsletters to mailing addresses will be ceased after the last issue of A Simple Guide (Apr-Jun, Issue 60). For more information, please contact ECHO via hotline or email.



CONTACT ECHO!

Please keep your subject: **ATTN to ECHO Programme**

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