

RIGHT CARE FOR ACHING BACKS

A new program is urging doctors to follow 16 guidelines including:

~ **Help patients quit smoking**

Smokers with back pain have more severe symptoms that last longer and have poorer outcomes after spinal surgery.

~ **Encourage patients to maintain normal activities and avoid bed rest**

Bed rest can lead to problems such as joint stiffness, muscle wasting, loss of bonemineral density and pressure sores.

~ **Use X-rays and CT scans only when appropriate**

Unnecessary for first six weeks after onset of pain unless there is indication of a more serious disorder.

~ **Use epidural steroid injections only when necessary**

Not recommended unless symptoms include radiating pain (sciatica, herniated disc).

~ **Hold off on surgery**

Not recommended in first six weeks of pain onset; half of patients with radiating low back pain recover spontaneously