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LAWYER PUTS HIS BACK INTO ERGONOMICS

Top personal injury lawyer David Marshall is flexing his muscles - and watching his back. President of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL), David is supporting a campaign to improve the health of the nation's spines – and that includes keeping an eye on his own.

“Around 180 million working days are lost to back pain every year, costing the country around £6 billion in lost production,” he says. “Taking better care of their workers would result in better productivity for employers and at the same time cut the number of compensation claims they face.”

Like many workers in the UK David spends long hours at his desk. And that could put him at risk of becoming one of the four out of five people who experience back pain lasting more than one day at some time in their lives.

David, whose association is backing the national charity BackCare in its aims to increase awareness of how to avoid back pain, is now making doubly sure that he is not inviting unnecessary aches and strains. “I’m far more aware now of how I sit at my desk,” he admits. “I also make a point of having a good stretch every so often to help me loosen up.

“According to the Confederation of British Industry, back pain is perhaps the greatest health concern for employers,” he points out. “Yet this could be dramatically reduced if employers took more responsibility by carrying out individual risk assessments and complying with the Health and Safety regulations.”

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BackCare deputy chief executive Nia Taylor comments: “Low back pain management remains crucially important for the UK economy. The direct healthcare costs and the costs resulting from sick leave and early retirement due to back pain reach an annual sum which is over three times higher than the corresponding costs for all cancer diseases.”

Ten tips from BackCare towards pain-free working

Many problems experienced by office workers could be solved by ergonomics – using the right kind of office equipment and positioning it correctly in relation to the body. BackCare’s ergonomics experts advise that correct use of workstations coupled with regular work breaks are vital if aches and strains are to be avoided. Their pointers towards pain-free working include:

- Keep your elbows at desk height and in line with the ‘home’ row of keys which will put your arms in the correct position. If they are not in the right position there will be too much strain on the shoulder joints and the neck region.
- Make sure the top of the computer screen is level with your eyes. If the screen is too low you will be bending your neck to compensate, which could lead to problems. A slightly lower position is recommended for the untrained keyboard operator to avoid excessive movement of the neck between the keyboard and the screen.
- Place your computer screen and keyboard directly in front of your sitting position.
- Having aligned yourself to the computer in the correct manner, use a foot rest if your feet aren’t flat on the floor.
- Use an easily adjustable seat with good lumbar support, making sure the lower back is supported.
- Ideally, your computer should be at right angles to the window so that light is not being reflected on to the screen and causing you to twist around in order to see properly. Use adjustable window coverings.

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- Stretch your legs and your muscles by getting up and moving away from your desk at regular intervals. Five minutes every hour is better than 15 minutes every two hours.
- If you have a lot of copy typing to do, use a document holder positioned level and at the same height as your screen so that you aren't bending your neck and/or changing your viewing distance.
- If using a mouse or other input device, ensure that it is located at the same level and next to your keyboard to avoid excessive reach.
- If you have any concerns with your workstation that you cannot sort out, raise them with your employer and ask them to carry out an assessment. Most alterations are simple and cost very little.

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Notes to editors:

1. The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) campaigns to prevent needless injuries caused by negligence and for changes in the law to help people who have been injured to gain proper redress through the courts and prevent avoidable injury.
2. BackCare is registered as the National Back Pain Association and was formed 35 years ago with the aim of ensuring that people with back pain had the widest possible range of treatments available to them.

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