

# **Back Pain And One Way To Get Rid Of It**

By John Robson

It is estimated that 85% of Americans suffer from back pain at some point during their lives. As well as the unpleasantness of the pain itself, sufferers may also have symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as a reduced ability to take part in activities they enjoy.

The back is a complex structure made up of bone, muscle, ligament, tendons, vertebral disks and other tissue. It is commonly injured through over exertion, straining or improper lifting. With these types of injuries the pain often arises from pulled or strained muscles or from muscle spasms.

Other conditions that can cause back pain include ruptured or bulging disks, arthritis, osteoporosis and structural issues like scoliosis. Sciatica is another common condition; this is where a vertebral disk presses against the sciatic nerve as it leaves the spinal column. Although the cause is in the back, the effects of sciatica are felt in the leg that the nerve is connected to, even though there is no actual damage to the leg itself.

There are also a significant number of back problems for which there is not a known cause.

Treatment options vary widely and run the gamut from invasive approaches like surgery to less invasive approaches such as hypnotherapy. Occupying the space between these extremes are a number of options like physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic and Feldenkrais (pronounced fel den krise). The effectiveness of any one approach varies from person to person – what works for one person may not work for someone else.

My expertise lies in the Feldenkrais Method® and I am often asked to describe what sets it apart from other modalities. Although it is difficult to generalize –given the sheer range of modalities available – a major difference is that learning is a main component.

With Feldenkrais we use the term “organic learning” to describe what has occurred when you actually know something within, as opposed to just knowing what you have been told. You may have been advised by an expert to keep your back straight and, although you may have total faith in that expert, do you really know within yourself that it is the solution? If you have taken that advice and ever forgotten it or not followed it then you – your brain and body – do not know it at an “organic” level.

Feldenkrais lessons are not instructions for “correct” movement. You are not told how to sit or stand or walk, but instead you learn to perceive how you move. You learn to consciously notice when you are making more effort than you need to, or when tension is arising. This awareness and consciousness allow you to move in new ways that are more comfortable and powerful than you may have thought possible.

Once you have learned the relationship between the various parts of yourself and how this relationship relates to function you will not move in a harmful or painful way again. This is because your brain has learned new patterns and it spontaneously selects the movements that best support the activity at hand and rejects harmful movement. You don't have to remember anything (like keeping your back straight), because you – your brain and body – know the best option having experienced it during Feldenkrais lessons.

Independent studies testify to the effectiveness of the approach. A University of Oregon study found that 76% of low back pain sufferers had significant improvement after just four Feldenkrais sessions. The American Journal of Pain Management reports that participants in an eight week Feldenkrais program had less pain one year later and had reduced their medical costs by 40%.

In my own experience, after years of back and shoulder pain that was treated with chiropractic, massage, electrical stimulation, and eventually, surgery, I found lasting relief once I experienced the Feldenkrais Method. I am now able to take part in any activity I choose – including heavy lifting, gardening and backpacking – while remaining pain free.

If you have pain that won't go away and you have found that other approaches have not given you long term relief you may want to give Feldenkrais a try. It is possible to become pain free and it is possible to get back to the activities you enjoy.