



# 12 TIPS to Avoid Aches and Pains

**T**he holiday season is right around the corner, and amid the decorating, gift wrapping, cooking and cleaning, there's the serious risk of adding pain to your back and neck that could make it a not-so-jolly Christmas.

In most cases holiday back and neck pain is simply a function of rushing around getting ready, jumping in the car, hanging around at the airport, sitting in a bad position on a plane or picking up your luggage, then BOOM...there goes your back.

As spine specialists, we've treated many patients suffering from overexertion during the holiday crunch. Here are some tips to avoid back and neck pain around the holidays.

- 1** When traveling, try not to get stressed running around and squeezing all those essential tasks into the frenetic last two days before you leave town. Stress increases your chance of a back or joint strain by increasing tension, but more likely by causing you to take short cuts with how you move, leading to bad positions and increased chance of injury.
- 2** Try to keep the weight of your suitcase down to a sensible level. Keep the weight distributed as evenly as possible too.
- 3** If you've had a long drive to the airport, walk around for five minutes before lifting luggage; make sure you keep your back straight, swivel your whole body and not the spine.
- 4** At your departure gate, don't spend your entire time sitting; walk around.
- 5** On your flight, try to sit upright, (some of us have no option or our knees get crushed), get up and walk around if you are able to. If you are going to sleep, get a travel pillow to help support your neck and prevent injury. Also, keep yourself hydrated; dehydration is a factor in muscle injuries.

- 6** Be careful loading and unloading luggage. Once you arrive at your destination, walk around and save the unpacking for an hour or so.
- 7** If you're helping in the kitchen, bend your knees and keep your back straight when lifting items out of the oven.
- 8** When it comes to shopping, make sure you avoid carrying all your bags in one hand. Try to distribute the weight as evenly as you can.
- 9** Be careful cutting down or carrying Christmas trees, reaching and over stretching to decorate trees, pulling decorations out of the attic, hanging lights, putting items together and tossing your young relatives into the air during family visits.
- 10** If you're going to nap, and face it, you probably are, go lie down in a bed. Too many of us end up in odd positions when we doze on the couch, and very few people really think about the angle of their neck before drifting off in the recliner. Inevitably, you wake up an hour later, and the first thing you do is reach up to massage your sore neck.
- 11** Be conscious of your posture, even while watching TV. Slumping into the couch places an unnatural strain on your spine. Make sure that your lower back is supported; use a pillow to give lumbar support if necessary.
- 12** One of the best ways to make sure you don't strain your back muscles while watching TV is rather simple: don't spend huge amounts of time in front of it. Granted, you will probably watch football or a holiday movie, but get up every hour and move around a bit. Change positions frequently when you're sitting down.

Most important of all though, make sure you have a great time and recharge your batteries. We want to help you get through this holiday with as little back and neck pain as possible. ∞

*NewSouth NeuroSpine is Mississippi's leading provider of comprehensive spine care, located at 2470 Flowood Drive in Flowood, Mississippi. Visit us online at [www.ns2.md](http://www.ns2.md).*