

LBNL Executive Health

Spinal Discord

Poor work habits can damage your vertebrae, warns Manasi Mithel

Javed Dastoor woke up one morning seven years ago to find he could not move his neck. "I had this severe pain in my back," he says. At age 32, his X-ray scans showed he had spondylitis – an inflammation of the bones in the vertebrae. Doctors soon found the reason: he had been spending long hours – sometimes as long as 18 to 19 hours – glued to his computer for the past 15 years.

He was advised to stop working for a week. He began regular physiotherapy and yoga. He still contin-

ued to work. The pain was too painful. Medical tests revealed severe calcium and Vitamin D deficiency, sparking off nerve compression syndrome – in which the nerves emerging from these vertebrae get entangled and cause pain. Doctors said it was brought on by lack of exercise and long hours of sitting in one position.

"I used to travel to the Asia Pacific countries for work but I've been advised against taking flights that are longer than six to seven hours," she says. Moghe now travels only within the country and

Further deterioration leads to spinal disc herniation, commonly known as slipped disc.

"The bone damage many young professionals suffer from is due to deficiency of Vitamin D caused by lack of exposure to sunlight," says Dr S.K.S. Marya, Chairman, Orthopaedics Max Healthcare, and President-Elect, India Orthopaedic Association. He estimates that three of five urban professionals are Vitamin D-deficient. "People move from their air-conditioned houses to their air-conditioned cars and



Strengthen Your Bones

Make sure your diet includes:

- Milk and milk products
- Fresh fruit such as apples, bananas and pears that have high iron content
- Fresh vegetables
- Proteins
- Not too much sugar

ues with the latter. Today, he blames lack of exercise, poor posture while at work and work-related stress for the problems with his spine despite his relative youth.

"You have to put in extra hours as you reach higher positions and have more commitments to fulfil with shorter deadlines," he says.

At 24, information technology professional Aditi Moghe was even younger than Dastoor when she found she could not sit for more than half an hour at a stretch – it

continues to take regular calcium and vitamin supplements.

Of the 206 bones in the average adult human body, the 24 that make up the spine are among the most sensitive. Of these 24, the cervical vertebrae – just below the skull – and lumbar vertebrae – near the waist – are the ones most vulnerable. Their deterioration can spark off either nerve compression syndrome, or paresthesia – which causes an uncomfortable tingling sensation in the affected area.

finally sit in their air-conditioned offices, minimising any kind of sun exposure," he adds. Lack of exercise, long hours spent on the computer, and paucity of fresh fruit in one's diet also contribute to weakening of the spine bones, leading to neck, shoulder and lower back pain.

Doctors say earlier people were unaware of the health risks their office-ridden, computer-dominated lives posed. They recommend at the least a regular post-lunch stroll in the sunshine. ♦