

THE WORKPLACE BACK INJURY — SURVIVAL — GUIDE



LUIS RAUL SCOTT, JR. ESQUIRE

The Workplace Back Injury Survival Guide

First Edition

By Luis Raul Scott, Jr. Esquire

The Bader Law Firm LLC

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Both Workplace Accidents and Overuse Cause Serious Back Pain	7
Common Back Injuries and Their Causes	9
Your Injured Back and Myofascial Trigger Points: What You Need to Know	11
Trigger Points and Back Injuries: Which Treatments Actually Work?	13
Resources on Trigger Point Treatment	15
Taking Care of Your Back After an Accident	17
Dr. John Sarno: Reflections on Chronic Workplace-Related Back Injuries	19
Delegating Chores Effectively With an Injured Back	21
Back Injuries 101: All About Vertebrae	23
Back Injuries 101: The Spinal Cord and Nerves	25
Back Injuries 101: Connective Tissue	27
A Brief, Objective History of Chiropractic Medicine	29
Chiropractic Care—Contrasting Views	31
Medication After a Back Injury: How to Avoiding Abusing or Misusing Medicine	33
Looking Back Since Your Workplace Accident: How Has Your Life Changed?	35
Looking Forward in Time After a Back Injury: Where Do You Want to Go?	37
Getting From A to B	39
Science Journalism About Recovering From a Workplace Back Injury	42

How to Build and Embody Resilience	45
The Game-Changing Power of the Weekly Review	47
Wrangling Your Inner Monologue	49
Excellence Is Not an Act But a Habit	51
Reclaiming Your Independence	54
Conclusion	57
Disclaimer	58

Introduction

Perhaps your back gave out as you caught a slipping load; or perhaps you slouched in an uncomfortable office chair day after day, year after year, and then developed extreme low back pain. Either way, your workplace accident debilitated you, and now you need to figure out the next steps. For better or for worse, you're not alone: millions of people can trace back pain to their workplaces.

In fact, back pain is the single most common complaint in a wide range of professions. At any given moment, [between 15% and 42% of the population suffers from back pain](#), much of it related to workplace accidents or to years of repetitive work.

In this book, we're going to explore this topic in great depth on the blog, providing insights and resources to help you deal with your journey to recovery. Below is an overview of some of the key areas we'll examine—please contact our team for help with workers' compensation.

Identifying Your Injury

Back pain can take many forms, none of which are particularly pleasant. Some injuries, like a pulled muscle, are temporary and manageable. Others, like a slipped disk, are acute and persistent. To determine how serious your injury is, see a doctor. (In future posts, we'll dive into the science—and controversy—of back injury diagnosis and explain how insurance companies think about these issues.)

Finding the Right Treatment

In some cases, a restful break may be all you need to heal. Physical therapy also helps repair muscles, reducing pain or eliminating it for good. Serious situations, like a slipped disk, may require surgery.

Back injuries from workplace accidents and overuse both qualify for workers' compensation in the state of Georgia. In other words, you may qualify for time off work as well as money to compensate you for costs related to physical therapy or surgery.

Living with the Agony

Despite the debilitating nature of these injuries, your life isn't over, and neither is your career. As we move forward, we'll take a look at various systems and ideas for living well with pain.

For instance, good lifting techniques and improved office space ergonomics can help once you return to work.

Both Workplace Accidents and Overuse Cause Serious Back Pain

Maybe your back spasmed suddenly after an accident at work; or maybe years of repetitive lifting, twisting, bending, or sitting have finally caught up with you. In either case, you may qualify for workers' compensation in the state of Georgia.

First, let's take a closer look at two key categories of back injuries.

#1. Accidental Injuries

A workplace mishap—caused perhaps by carelessness, lack of signage or a supervisor's assigning you a task that you weren't physically strong enough to handle—suddenly and obviously debilitated you. For example, you slipped on a wet floor, or a heavy load fell as you lifted it. Injuries of this kind can cause back strain, muscle tears, or painful muscle spasms. Despite their excruciating nature, these injuries are often more straightforward than cumulative injuries, because they can be traced back to a single incident.

Acute Trauma Can Still Cause Persistent Pain

A crisis that takes minutes or even seconds to unfold can have profound repercussions—and it's often hard to predict what will happen long term. For instance, a broken back—caused by a two-story fall off construction scaffolding—might heal in just a few months. A more minor-seeming problem, such as a slipped disk, can cause shooting pain that lasts for years because it's continually putting pressure on the nerves in your back. (Learn more about [how to recognize a slipped disk](#) here.)

#2. Overuse Injuries

Any physical task—from lifting a heavy box to sitting all day at a desk—can cause back pain if you do it too much. [Up to 90% of people experience back pain](#) at some point. Most of these cases are due to overuse rather than a traumatic accident.

Work Can Exacerbate Pre-Existing Back Problems

Repetitive work overloads specific muscles in the back, making it more difficult for them to recover from strain. This can exacerbate problems like arthritis, scoliosis, and osteoporosis, weakening your back and leaving it vulnerable to injury. Given time, overuse injuries can be just as painful as accidental injuries. (Learn how to [prevent overuse injuries at work](#) here.)

Common Back Injuries and Their Causes

Strains, sprains, and muscle tears are the [most common workplace injuries that keep people from work](#) in the United States. Although they affect every industry, the most vulnerable people labor in physically demanding jobs in transportation, warehousing, agriculture, forestry, and healthcare.

Pulled Muscle

If you overuse a back muscle—either in a single, stressful incident or by repeating the same movement over and over—you may strain it. Twisting is especially stressful for the back, so even office workers who swivel frequently between tasks risk pulling a lower back muscle.

Sprained Back

If you expose a back ligament to intense stress—again, either through repetitive movement, like moving boxes, or a single incident—it may tear. A torn back ligament, or a back sprain, takes longer to heal than a pulled muscle.

Pulled muscles and sprained backs are the most common causes of lower back pain; fortunately, though they might not feel like it, they're also the easiest to treat. Most strains will heal naturally in several weeks, although physical therapy can prevent future injuries. (Learn more about [identifying and treating lumbar sprains and pulled muscles](#) here.)

Slipped Disk

A slipped disk, or hernia, is the result of overexertion (e.g. from lifting a hospital patient) . The disk protrudes from the spine and pinches

adjacent nerves, causing lower back pain and sciatica. (Learn more about recognizing the [symptoms of a slipped disk](#) here.)

Broken Vertebrae

There's nothing subtle about a broken spine, nor much surprising about what causes it. Workplace accidents, often in dangerous industries like manufacturing and farming, can break the bones in the vertebrae, sometimes leading to chronic back pain that lasts for years.

Spinal Cord Injury

Damage to the nerves of the spinal cord causes loss of sensation, loss of function, and, sometimes, even paralysis.

Your Injured Back and Myofascial Trigger Points: What You Need to Know

Whether you wrenched your back in a lifting accident—a single moment of agony—or hurt yourself through repetitive work over months or years, you'd like to understand the root cause of your discomfort. Why does your pain fail to correspond directly to the injured point? Why do your muscles feel tight and/or tender to the touch? Why does the right massage—done in just the right way—give you so much temporary relief?

The answer could be that your back injury has been caused by (or exacerbated by) **myofascial trigger points**. In today's post and two that follow, we'll explore these strange, poorly understood and significant sources of chronic back pain.

Defining Trigger Points

In 1942, Dr. Janet Travell coined the term "trigger point" in hopes of describing and treating a phenomenon with the following attributes:

- **Pain related to a specific point in the fascia** (a type of connective tissue) not caused by inflammation or infection, or explained via a neurological examination.
- If pressed upon, the trigger point is **felt as a hardened nodule** within a taut band of muscle.
- A **twitch response** (but not a muscle spasm) may occur upon placing pressure on the trigger point.

Although they can appear in numerous locations, trigger points are most commonly seen in the shoulders, neck, pelvis and hips.

Referred Pain

[Trigger points](#) share some attributes with tender points, but their defining characteristic is referred pain. If pressure is placed on one point, it may refer, or transfer some of the pain to another location. For example, a trapezius-based trigger point can refer pain up the side of the neck and all the way to the head. This referred pain may ultimately lead to a severe headache.

What [Causes Trigger Points](#) to Activate?

Many factors prompt trigger point activation, including:

- Muscle overload
- Bad posture
- Direct trauma to an area.

If trigger points activate in one region of the body, other areas may also activate in response.

Once you've identified the source of your pain and the cause, you can take steps to address and eliminate it. In our next chapter, we'll explore pain relief options—stay tuned!

Trigger Points and Back Injuries: Which Treatments Actually Work?

Myofascial trigger points (TPS) remain shrouded in mystery; while recent research has uncovered many possible causes and treatment approaches, no one solution applies to all TPS sufferers. Some patients may be forced to try several approaches before finding one that works consistently. The following are a few of the best options for trigger point relief. (Please note that this is not a health blog, and we are not attempting to diagnose or treat you here! See your physician if you're in pain and before you start any medical treatment.)

Strength Training

Many patients suffer TPS due to muscle overload. Strength training prevents new trigger points by reducing the risk of overexertion. However, to be effective, strength training generally must be undertaken on a gradual basis. An overly ambitious regimen could lead to far worse trigger point pain.

Soft Tissue Massage

In the short-term, self-massage can often provide significant relief. However, a certified massage therapist can better target problem areas. Look for a therapist experienced in trigger point therapy.

Dry Needling

Sometimes referred to as intramuscular stimulation, dry needling stimulates myofascial trigger points, allowing physical therapists to reach areas that cannot be manually targeted.

Acupuncture

Not to be confused with dry needling, acupuncture has relieved both acute and chronic pain for thousands of years. Acupuncturists focus on meridians, where the energy, or Qi, may be concentrated. A study published by the International Association for the Study of Pain found a high degree of correspondence between trigger points and acupuncture points.

Myopulse

A sophisticated non-invasive therapy, [myopulse treatment](#) involves application of low voltage micro-currents, which, when sent through injured areas, promote quick pain relief and long-term healing.

Trigger point sufferers typically begin with non-invasive therapies such as strength training or massage, switching to more advanced approaches if necessary. No one strategy will work equally well for all TPS patients; be open to trying unfamiliar treatments (with your physician's careful guidance) .

Resources on Trigger Point Treatment

If you suspect trigger points (TPS) are responsible for your current work-related back pain, the following resources offer useful insight:

The Concise Book of Trigger Points

A classic in the growing trigger point field, this [essential guide](#) has been translated into over twenty languages. Although published over a decade ago, the manual has been updated on numerous occasions with the latest research. Detailed information and illustrations will help your (and your doctor) navigate TPS and referred pain.

Trigger Points Explained With Animation

Looking for a simplified explanation of trigger points, accompanied by easy-to-understand visuals? Check out this [YouTube video](#), which breaks down all the terminology you struggle to keep straight.

What Is a Trigger Point? Trigger Points Explained

[Wizard of Health](#) offers a simple trigger point 101 video on YouTube. The four-minute clip provides a basic definition of trigger points, along with a break-down of the confusing terms included in the typical medical definition. The video also provides a valuable analogy involving an adapter plugged into a socket, which makes it easier to grasp confusing concepts.

Needling Therapies in the Management of Myofascial Trigger Point Pain

Interested in dry needling or acupuncture? This notable [study](#) explores the expanding role of these therapies in TPS pain management.

Further insight into dry needling can be found in an additional study from the APTA's [Physical Therapy](#) journal.

Myofascial Pain Syndrome Support Group

Finding social support for your condition can be a real struggle. Thankfully, multiple support groups exist online. This group from [DailyStrength](#) is especially valuable. Browse existing threads or ask the group's 200+ members for input. (Of course, do not engage in any therapy without first consulting a qualified physician.)

The better you understand trigger point induced pain, the better you can advocate for yourself as a workers' compensation claimant.

Taking Care of Your Back After an Accident

A shocking 80 percent of Americans experiences back pain at some point in their lives. While many witness gradual onset with age, others suffer acute pain due to workplace accidents. Quick recovery hinges on prompt medical attention and proper care at home.

Eager to [eradicate back pain](#)? This is obviously not a medical blog. And you should never change your exercise or dietary regimen before speaking with your doctor—but you might find these insights useful:

Rethinking Bed Rest?

Medical experts once prescribed rest as a cure-all for back problems, but recent research suggests that prolonged rest could hurt more than it helps. Today, authorities generally recommend gently resuming physical activity soon after an accident. A simple stroll every day can make a world of difference, as can recovery-oriented yoga classes.

Take Regular Breaks

Instead of committing to long, uninterrupted periods of bed rest, talk to your doctor/therapist about taking regular breaks to avoid overloading your back. Breaks may prove necessary for both physical and sedentary activities. For example, instead of sitting at your desk all afternoon, stand up and move around at least once every half hour.

Be Diligent About Physical Therapy

Merely visiting your physical therapist on occasion is not good enough; honor all appointments and complete any recommended exercises. Be honest with your physical therapist about your routine and current pain. Avoid underplaying or exaggerating what's happening with you.

Don't Expect an Immediate Recovery

Moderate your expectations. Anticipate weeks, possibly even months of difficulty following your back injury. Don't get frustrated if your back doesn't heal as quickly as you initially hoped. If you push recovery and try to return to your regular routine before you're ready, you could suffer even worse injuries.

Dr. John Sarno: Reflections on Chronic Workplace-Related Back Injuries

An influential, yet controversial figure, Dr. John Sarno hypothesized a psychosomatic condition known as tension myositis syndrome. Also referred to as tension myoneural syndrome (TMS), the condition characterizes a variety of nerve issues that lack an obvious physical trigger, including, most notably, chronic back pain. His research provides an alternate perspective for those suffering chronic pain months, even years after a workplace injury.

Is Back Pain Physical or Mental?

In "[Healing Back Pain: The Mind-Body Connection](#)," Dr. Sarno claims that pain not relieved by typical medical treatments can be blamed on repressed emotional problems. He doesn't suggest the pain is inside your head; he argues that it's real and it results from an intense battle within your mind. It's a controversial theory, but his allegedly [successful treatment](#) of over ten thousand patients indicates that psychosomatic issues may indeed play a role in ongoing back pain.

The Link Between TMS and Workplace Injuries

Your workplace accident may be to blame for initial back pain, but per the TMS hypothesis, post-traumatic issues could be at fault for at least some ongoing symptoms; Dr. Sarno believes psychological struggles can manifest as physical pain. He argues that your pain will continue until you unearth and deal with repressed emotions.

Blogger Paul Ingraham offers a more in depth review of Dr. Sarno's work in [this series of posts](#). This [obituary in the New York Times](#) offers

another valuable perspective. Notably, the Times writes: “Some of [Sarno’s] ideas, like his assertion that there is no correlation between chronic back pain and herniated discs, have been validated by research published in The New England Journal of Medicine.”

Healing the Body With the Mind

Irrespective of what you think about the TMS hypothesis, workplace victims can take the following away from Dr. John Sarno's books: Mental attitude can have a huge impact on physical recovery. Although your current pain likely originated with a legitimate injury, it might now be treatable. If you have a clean bill of health but lingering pain several months after your accident, it may be time to explore what mental triggers could be impeding your success.

Delegating Chores Effectively With an Injured Back

From shoveling the driveway to folding laundry, you never realized the important role your back played in household chores until now. Unfortunately, as you recover from a debilitating back injury, you'll likely find it exceedingly difficult to keep up with household obligations. Effective delegation can ensure that you contribute to the household without experiencing undue pain.

Perform Mental Chores

From budgeting to taxes and even sorting through junk mail, you're still probably capable of completing a variety of essential tasks. As you divvy up these chores with your partner, children and household assistants, allow somebody else to do the heavy lifting. You can contribute by tackling paperwork and other low-impact activities.

Learn How to Perform Chores Properly

Select chores may still be possible if you've suffered a mild to moderate back injury. Avoid additional pain by performing tasks correctly. For vacuuming, raking and mopping, this means turning your trunk with your feet planted, rather than extending your arms while bending at the waist.

Invest in Outside Services

Caregivers suffer a huge burden; in addition to their usual responsibilities, they must provide round-the-clock care and take on a greater share of the housework. Landscaping or cleaning services could make their lives far easier, removing at least one item from their

ever-increasing to-do list. If you can't afford professional services, hire a local teenager to mow the lawn or boost your kids' allowance in exchange for a little extra help around the house.

Don't Trust Reduced Pain

The pain from your injury may ease up, but that's doesn't mean you're ready for tough physical labor. Don't trust suddenly disappearing pain; visit your physical therapist or physician to confirm that you're ready for heavy lifting or other physically demanding jobs.

Back Injuries 101: All About Vertebrae

The back is a surprisingly complicated structure, making it difficult to ascertain the specific cause of—and solution to—chronic pain. As a back pain sufferer, it behooves you to gain a thorough understanding of the damage you may have endured. Read on to learn about the vertebrae, which play a critical role in [numerous injuries](#):

What Are Vertebrae?

Vertebrae consist of a series of nearly three dozen interlocking bones. Together, these make up the spinal column. Each vertebra features a load-bearing body, an arch that protects the spinal cord and attachment points that ensure flexible movement.

Classifying Vertebrae

Experts classify vertebrae based on their position. For example, the spinal column's upper portion features cervical vertebrae, while thoracic vertebrae offer attachment points for the ribs. The sacral and caudal vertebrae are fused into the sacrum and tailbone.

Common Vertebral Injuries

A variety of injuries strike the vertebrae; most are serious enough to cause severe pain. Vertebral compression fractures may occur in response to osteoporosis, but can also result from excessive pressure or a hard fall. Especially serious compression fractures are known as burst fractures; these occur when the bone shatters, with bone fragments possibly piercing the spinal cord.

Although less severe than burst fractures, vertebral dislocation can prove quite painful. Dislocation occurs when one or more vertebrae

are displaced, typically in response to a traumatic neck injury. Occasionally, dislocation and fractures occur at the same time, damaging both soft tissue and the spinal cord.

Symptoms of vertebral injuries vary somewhat based on the severity and whether a burst occurs, but sufferers can expect to experience intense pain, which worsens while standing or walking. Many also suffer reduced range of motion.

Back Injuries 101: The Spinal Cord and Nerves

Back injuries involving severe trauma frequently lead to spinal cord damage. Ensuing problems could be life-changing, with victims suffering partial or complete paralysis. Immediate treatment is imperative, so it's important to understand the condition and recognize symptoms.

What Is the Spinal Cord?

The spinal cord consists of a bundle of nerve fibers enclosed within the spine. This important group of fibers connects most parts of the body to the brain. Together, the brain and spinal cord form the central nervous system.

Spinal Nerves

Dozens of spinal nerves emerge from the spinal cord, appearing in short branches known as roots. Sensory roots carry information from all over the body to the brain. Motor roots deliver commands from the brain to various body parts, including skeletal muscles.

Common Spinal Cord Injuries

Spinal cord injuries are among the most [permanently debilitating](#) of all back problems. These injuries are defined based on where they occur and the severity of the damage. These factors also determine the extent to which the patient can control his or her limbs following injury. A complete injury occurs when the patient loses nearly all feeling and motor function below the site of damage. Those with incomplete injuries retain some motor or sensory function.

If the injury impacts the arms, legs, trunk and internal organs, it may be referred to as quadriplegia. Paraplegia occurs when the legs, trunk and internal organs are affected, but not the arms and hands.

Symptoms of Spinal Cord Injuries

Top spinal cord injury symptoms include loss of motor function and feeling in the affected areas. Additionally, spinal cord damage could lead to loss of bladder control, difficulty breathing, exaggerated spasms, lack of coordination or an intense stinging sensation.

Back Injuries 101: Connective Tissue

When [picturing back injuries](#), people typically imagine fractures or other acute issues. In reality, some of the most common—and debilitating—conditions involve chronic connective tissue damage. Keep reading for a brief overview of need-to-know terms and other valuable information about connective tissue related back pain.

Tendons and Ligaments

Tendons and ligaments are fibrous bands of connective tissue that link two or more structures (typically bones or cartilage) together. These tissue bands are often to blame for work-related back pain; employees may twist or pull tendons or ligaments while completing everyday work functions. The result: strains and sprains, which involve muscle cramping and significantly decreased range of motion.

Fascia

Often compared to sweaters due to their densely woven structure, fascia cover bones, muscles, nerves and internal organs. They also protect the spinal cord.

An oft-forgotten element of spinal injuries, fascia remain poorly understood. Fascia injuries typically follow repeated strain, such as heavy lifting or frequent bending. Patients may experience either a dull pain or more intense sensations that worsen while completing essential workday tasks. Over time, fascia injuries may lead to trigger points (and further pain) , or reduced strength and range of motion.

Synovial Membrane

A protective layer of connective tissue responsible for protecting tendons and joints, the synovial membrane (also known as the synovium) can become inflamed or damaged by traumatic joint injuries. This may lead to pain or swelling. Synovial cysts often result from spinal degeneration. Although uncommon, this condition can cause back pain, leg pain (known as sciatica) and sometimes, muscle weakness or cramping in the legs.

A Brief, Objective History of Chiropractic Medicine

Chiropractic medicine emerged over a century ago, but it remains as steeped in controversy as ever. Read on to learn more about the practice's fascinating history, and where it's headed in the future.

Daniel David Palmer and the Founding of Chiropractic

In 1895, Iowa resident Daniel David Palmer performed a chiropractic treatment on custodian Harvey Lillard. Palmer observed a vertebra out of position and requested an explanation from Lillard. According to Lillard, a 'pop' in his back had caused partial deafness many years before. Chiropractic advocates believe that Palmer then restored Lillard's hearing via an adjustment, although accounts of the interaction vary considerably.

Palmer's friend Rev. Samuel Weed helped to name the practice by suggesting a combination of the terms cheiros and praktikos, meaning completed by hand. Soon after, Palmer began to teach others his techniques. He launched a magnetic healing facility, but met with early controversy from several skeptics. Despite this, he never struggled to find students for his Palmer School of Chiropractic.

Palmer's son B.J. eventually assumed control of the Palmer School of Chiropractic and later founded the Universal Chiropractic Association. He promoted formal training as a necessity for the quickly developing branch of medicine, largely in an effort to quiet critics. Despite this, many chiropractors of the early 1900s were charged with practicing medicine without a license.

Additional controversy surrounded two main types of chiropractors: straights and mixers. Straights practiced chiropractic without instruments, while mixers advocated extensively for their use in chiropractic medicine.

Growing Acceptance in the Medical Community

Following several decades of strife, chiropractic began to obtain greater acceptance among traditional medical professionals. Today, tens of thousands of chiropractors practice throughout the United States. Although the field continues to face resistance from skeptics, multiple studies indicate the medical community's increased willingness to at least consider chiropractic's merits.

Chiropractic Care—Contrasting Views

Chiropractic medicine holds a long history of controversy, with founder Daniel David Palmer facing both extensive praise and criticism from the very beginning. Proponents praise the practice's alleged ability to cure musculoskeletal problems not fully relieved through traditional medicine. Critics, however, refer to the practice as 'quack science.' Which [side is right](#)? Check out two distinct viewpoints below, and judge for yourself.

Journal of the American Medical Association: In Support of Chiropractic Treatment

Chiropractic increasingly holds favor in the medical establishment. No further proof is needed than a promising 2017 study published in [JAMA](#). The review delves into over two dozen randomized clinical trials, concluding that spinal manipulative therapy could prompt modest improvements for patients with mild musculoskeletal issues.

Opposition to Chiropractic: Unsubstantiated Claims and Adverse Symptoms

Those who object to chiropractic treatment no longer deny that the approach can occasionally help select patients. However, critics worry that some chiropractic experts profess to effectively treat non-musculoskeletal problems—a claim not yet backed up by research. Furthermore, research indicates that chiropractic treatment can sometimes prompt adverse reactions. For example, a study published in [Spine](#) found that nearly a third of patients suffered adverse symptoms directly attributed to recent chiropractic treatments.

No matter your stance on chiropractic care, it is imperative that you proceed with caution. For best results, speak to a qualified doctor to guide you. Perhaps, for instance, you might benefit from combining chiropractic with standard medical treatment. Don't rely on chiropractic to solve problems beyond your musculoskeletal system. With a realistic approach, you may be able to make significant progress towards recovery from select workplace injuries.

Medication After a Back Injury: How to Avoiding Abusing or Misusing Medicine

The opioid epidemic understandably has Americans reluctant to ease physical suffering with painkillers. Many physicians now restrict the use of opioid medications, but some patients still require these drugs to handle severe pain. It's possible to achieve a balance and [avoid abuse](#); keep these suggestions in mind as you proceed with caution.

Develop a Structured Plan

Discuss any concerns regarding painkiller addiction with your physician, especially if you or a family member has a history of abuse. If you're really concerned, create a plan that prevents dosage increases. Track your medication intake, and do not stray from your doctor's recommendations.

Seek Accountability From Loved Ones

Spouse, parent, friend... somebody should help you monitor your painkiller intake. Let this person know if you intend to seek a dosage increase or extend your usage past your initial timeline. Reach out the moment you suspect an inclination towards abuse.

Get Rid of Medications When You're Finished

Don't let temptation sit around your home, especially if you're prone to substance abuse. If you have leftovers following your requisite period of opioid use, destroy them as soon as possible.

Know the Warning Signs

The more self-aware you are, the better your chances of nipping emerging drug abuse problems in the bud. Watch out for the following warning signs:

- Constant rumination over medication
- Ordering painkillers from sources other than your physician (such as the internet or stealing drugs from others)
- Use of painkillers long after the pain disappears
- Moodiness, especially when you don't take painkillers
- Reluctance to discuss painkiller use with others

Looking Back Since Your Workplace Accident: How Has Your Life Changed?

There's no denying it—your workplace injury changed everything. Whether you currently suffer physical pain or anxiety about your future, life no longer looks quite like it did before your accident. The key to moving forward in peace? Acknowledging and accepting what's true now. As the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, eloquently put it: "Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them—that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like."

Follow these suggestions to get your life back on track:

Determine What's Different Now

Take a few minutes to think carefully about your day-to-day life and how it's changed since the accident. Examples may include:

- An inability to pursue previous hobbies
- Fewer social outings and an ensuing sense of social isolation
- Limited mobility if you can no longer drive
- You may no longer feel as if you contribute positively to your community or society at large

Clarify Your True Feelings and Needs

Once you've determined how life differs today, delve into your true feelings about the situation, and your plans to move forward. In your journal, reflect on the following questions:

- Are there any silver linings to my situation? Any small ways in which my life is better today than it was before?

- What stands in the way of the goals I set for myself prior to the accident?
- How could my goals change to reflect my new reality while still allowing me to move forward with full satisfaction?

A little reflection can make a big difference as you determine how to proceed. Life might not look exactly like it did before your workplace accident, but there's still plenty to accomplish and plenty to celebrate.

Looking Forward in Time After a Back Injury: Where Do You Want to Go?

Don't underestimate the power of your vision to change the world. Whether that world is your office, your community, an industry or a global movement, you need to have a core belief that what you contribute can fundamentally change the paradigm or way of thinking about problems. –Leroy Hood

Life may look different following a back injury, but there's no need to spend the rest of your days moping. Yes, you'll face challenges that once seemed unimaginable, but you'll tackle them head-on and emerge stronger than ever. These suggestions can help:

Sketch Out Your Idea of a Dream Life

What would you do if your disability didn't get in the way? Be specific. At minimum, determine how you'd one day like to feel. Key adjectives may include fulfilled, energetic, calm, or loved. If it helps, capture ideas about your future with quotes or images.

Don't Edit Your Ideas (At Least at This Stage)

One of the reasons people struggle to create a vision is that they get locked in certain modes of thinking, known as “paradigms.” These ways of filtering the world reduce information overload, but they also limit your creativity. For instance, let's say one of your goals is to (one day) climb Mount Kilimanjaro. You've had that on your list since you were a teenager—back when you were younger and healthier. Now that your back's blown out, perhaps that goal seems less realistic than

ever. You might be tempted to cross it off your list and never revisit it. However, in spite of your injury, you still may be able to do it. Perhaps there are special trips to Mount Kilimanjaro reserved for people with disabilities—maybe you could even qualify for a sponsorship to get paid to hike! Or maybe your injury will prompt you to invest more in personal fitness. You'll recover to a higher level of fitness than you had before the accident—and be on target to go mountaineering. The point is that you don't want to edit your brainstorming prematurely. At some point, your dreams need to come into contact with reality, but first give yourself space to dream big.

Key Questions For Reflection

- If I knew I couldn't fail, what would I immediately try to achieve?
- Imagine looking back at your success from after the completion date. What does that look and feel like?
- What secret resources do I have available to help me?
- What am I most afraid of? What would happen if those fears came true? (Surface both your big dreams *and* your big fears, so you have a complete inventory of what matters to you.)

In our next chapter, we'll discuss how to connect the dots between your current reality (what you explored and wrote down after working through the last post) and your ideal vision.

Getting From A to B

If you've gone through the exercises we suggested, you've now hopefully clarified two key things:

- What's true now in your life, after your workplace back injury.
- Your vision for what you want to achieve in the months ahead.

Now, it's time to bridge the gap between planning and doing. Ask yourself these three questions, and write down the answers in a journal—and/or work through them with the help of a coach.

1. **To reach my goals, what is the absolute minimum that needs to get done?** Often, when we think about goals, we assume that the pathway must follow some specific contour. But in making those assumptions, we give ourselves lots of extra work. For instance, let's say one of your goals is to minimize your child care obligations (because of your hurt back) to 2 hours a day. You may assume that you'll need to hire a nanny, and in order to do that, you'll need a source of funds. And in order to get funds to afford a nanny, you'll need a new source of income. And so on. However, if you focus on the goal instead of on the presumed path to the goal, you might find shortcuts. Maybe the absolute minimum would involve asking your sister to move in with you for a few months to assist with the child care. That would circumvent the need for the nanny/funds/second job.
2. **How can I succeed in spite of my injury?** We covered this a bit in our previous post, but it's an idea worth exploring in depth. Your back is hurt. Maybe you're in constant pain due to fibromyalgia symptoms you developed after a grueling desk job. Maybe your lower back is in constant, shooting pain. Okay. That may be true. But if you want to (for instance) get back into your hobby of carving wooden figurines, you can find workarounds. Maybe the

pain will prevent you from sitting more than two hours at a time. No problem. Adjust your workflow to accommodate. Maybe you need to invest in more ergonomic equipment. Etc. The point is, you can almost certainly benefit from thinking through how to succeed in spite of your limitations.

3. **Who can help me get to my goals?** It's impossible to do anything truly amazing in this world without support. Now's the time to lean on good people. For instance, strong legal representation with your Georgia workers' compensation case can make a world of difference. (The Bader Law Firm LLC team is here to help at (678) 562-5595.)

Determine Your First Step—And Take It!

Break down your top goal into actionable steps. For example: maybe you want to become a social worker, and you need extra education to make this dream a reality. Start by researching a few local colleges with social work programs. Determine admission requirements for these schools. Gather high school or college transcripts. These simple steps will snowball into real progress.

Record Your Efforts

Every day, do at least one thing to take you closer to executing each long-term goal. You don't necessarily have to make grand gestures. For example, if you're saving for a down payment on a house, skip that Starbucks latte and prepare coffee at home instead.

Each day, record your successes and any areas in which you could improve. Read these daily entries regularly to determine whether you're consistently making progress towards your goal, or whether it's time to reassess.

Questions For Reflection

Reflect on these in your journal:

- What holds me back from taking action and executing on the plans I've carefully drafted?
- What motivates me most to pursue my dreams?
- What simple steps can I take to make progress every day?

Science Journalism About Recovering From a Workplace Back Injury

The following stories offer intriguing insights and actionable advice:

Taking a Stand: Does Ditching Your Sitting Desk Improve Your Health?

Typically, when you picture a workplace injury, you think of terrifying accidents or the wear and tear of heavy lifting. However, office jobs can prove just as harmful. A whopping 60 percent of office workers suffer back pain. Eager to find a solution, the University of Pittsburgh's Bethany Barone Gibbs, PhD has conducted [extensive research](#) on the perils of sitting at a desk day in and day out. Her research indicates that simply alternating between sitting and standing can make a huge difference.

Prevention of Occupational Back Pain

An important study from the [Journal of Family & Community Medicine](#) highlights the inherent difficulty of distinguishing back pain caused by workplace duties and pain occurring due to other factors. The study also delves into the greater struggle of translating the latest research of workplace-related back pain to public policy. Researchers believe that, unless employers implement preventative measures, occupational back pain will continue to be a problem for a significant portion of the population.

Why Trainers Work Through the Pain of an Injury

This story from the [Washington Post](#) explores a common problem in many industries: working through injuries, or returning to work too

quickly. The article mentions a study from the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute, which highlights especially concerning conditions in the personal training industry that may prompt back injury and problematic recovery.

Study Finds Yoga Can Help Back Pain—But Keep It Gentle

Research conducted by the Boston Medical Center and reported by [NPR](#) indicates that yoga can prove helpful for those dealing with back pain—to an extent. In yoga, it's easy to overdo it, so it's best to opt for guided classes explicitly designed for beginners or those recovering from injury.

Alternatives to Medication and Surgery

Prescription drugs can alleviate the worst of back pain. In light of the opioid epidemic, however, many people are eager to avoid certain medications at all costs. Many also hope to avoid the difficulties of surgery. Thankfully, alternatives exist. Research suggests that exercise and physical therapy can be just as effective for some patients. These findings are highlighted in a story from [Scientific American](#).

Poll: Doctors Are Still Prescribing Lots Of Opioids For Low Back Pain

According to the [NPR-Truven Health Analytics Health Poll](#), over half of Americans have suffered lower back pain in the last year. While many of these respondents treated the pain on their own without visiting a medical expert; of those who eventually visited the doctor, 40 percent received prescriptions for painkillers. Other common approaches include physical therapy, exercise, injections, and massage.

Where Did All My Muscles Go?

One of the most frustrating aspects of recovery? Regaining your strength. In this story, [Esquire](#) explores the speed with which muscles shrink upon taking a hiatus. The article reveals that, you are not actually losing muscles, but rather, experiencing a reduction in muscle fiber size. You'll learn how quickly to expect your muscles to return to their normal state, and how to remain optimistic as you deal with the difficulties of recovery.

Pro Athlete Recovery: Genetics or Superior Care?

A notable story from the [Washington Post](#) indicates that pro athletes recover in record time, in part, because they receive such excellent care. Amateurs, on the other hand, may not receive the prompt medical attention needed to get in shape after suffering a back injury. Although this article highlights care among athletes, its lessons apply to the general population. The takeaway? In recovery, quality care plays as great of a role as genetic predisposition.

Mentally Recovering From Injury

There's more to recovery than physical healing. The helplessness prompted by back injuries may spark anger or depression. This article from [Outside Online](#) notes the psychological elements of recovery, and offers actionable advice for moving forward. Although geared towards athletes, its message benefits anybody with a debilitating back injury.

How to Build And Embody Resilience

From illness to rejection, we all face challenges. Some, however, have a way of testing our very being. Resilience can get you through these tough times and even harness them to achieve a more fulfilling life.

Defining Resilience

Often used but not always understood, the term 'resilience' refers to your ability to recover quickly despite facing difficulties. The better you can adapt to challenges, the more resilient you are.

Resilience: Genetic Or Learned?

The age-old nature versus nurture debate once again proves relevant when discussing resilience. [Researchers at Harvard](#) believe that nature plays a role; some children simply cope with adversity better than others. However, resilience is also a learned trait. Even if you weren't born with this capability, there's hope for the future.

Keys to Bouncing Back After Setbacks

It's never too late to strengthen your resistance to adversity. The following are a few of the most effective tactics for building and embodying resilience:

- [Research indicates](#) that the most resilient individuals typically tend to **lean on support from strong social networks**. Turn to trusted friends and family members when you face crises, or get involved in a support group.
- **Reframe difficult situations to have a more positive spin**. It's tough, but if you can view each challenge as an opportunity, you'll find it easier to persevere.

- **Accept the role of change in your life.** As a familiar cliché states, the only constant is change. If you expect challenging transitions, you won't feel as caught off guard when they inevitably occur.

The Game-Changing Power of the Weekly Review

Statistics from the [Pew Research Center](#) indicate that 20 percent of Americans suffer from information overload. With constant exposure to advertisements, TV shows, podcasts and social media posts, it's difficult to apply the information we encounter to our daily lives.

You may never absorb and fully utilize all of the information you encounter, but the right system can help you make the most of especially relevant stuff. Read on to learn about the power of the weekly review and how to integrate this key practice into your life:

Why a Weekly Review Helps

Your weekly review offers a valuable opportunity to organize an array of information in an easily digestible manner. Your chief goal? To reduce confusion and expedite the week ahead. Remember the analogy of sharpening the saw to expedite cutting down a tree? Think of this process as your version of sharpening the saw.

How to Conduct a Weekly Review

Begin by scheduling a time to review, free of distractions. Examine your current projects and rank them based on urgency. Look at your calendar, and jot down details as necessary. Think about projects for which you've struggled to set aside time, and determine how you can fit even small aspects of these tasks into your schedule for the next week.

Reviewing, Not Doing

The key to [success in a weekly review](#): abiding by its name. Spend this special time *reviewing*, and not *doing*. Resist the urge to tackle items on your checklist, and instead, focus on prioritizing and scheduling. You'll thank yourself later.

Wrangling Your Inner Monologue

The cliché 'mountain out of a molehill' may not exactly apply to your situation, but if you're like most of us, you've made bad circumstances worse purely through the power of thought. From illness to financial struggles, your inner monologue can sometimes be a bigger problem than the actual issue at hand. Thankfully, it's never too late to explore that dark inner monologue with compassionate, loving curiosity... and, possibly, make it work in your favor.

Why Our Negative Monologue Takes Over

This useful article published in [Psychology Today](#) refers to rumination as a natural response to difficult life circumstances. The brain attempts to solve lingering issues, but it gets stuck in a negative feedback loop. As an evolutionary mechanism, this tendency towards negative thinking once kept us on the alert for predators and other natural hazards. Today, it just stresses us out and prevents us from reaching our full potential.

Techniques For Taking Control of [Unwanted Rumination](#)

Write it Out—And Develop Plans

Sometimes, the best solution for rumination involves getting it out of your head and onto a sheet of paper. Set an alarm and, for a five or ten-minute period, write about whatever comes to mind. Later, examine your written thoughts for patterns. Highlight important passages, and determine how you can transform them into active plans. Even simple steps will help.

Meditation

It may not be possible to fully rid your brain of problematic mental chatter, but you can at least learn to deal with those thoughts constructively through meditation. Enroll in a class or try it from the comfort of your own home. Focus on your breath, and instead of attempting to banish negative thoughts, observe them impartially and with curiosity and kindness if possible. After taking note of these thoughts, grant them permission to float away.

Excellence Is Not an Act But a Habit

Countless motivational posters display the quote, "Excellence is not an act, but a habit," alongside inspirational images. Unfortunately, it takes more than mere motivation to transform this idea into action.

Research indicates that habits form after 21 days, but not all are desirable. Whether you're dealing with a disability, illness or other difficult circumstances, it is imperative that you build the *right* habits.

Habits can best be classified as *start doing* or *stop doing*. With start doing habits, the goal is to add something new to your routine. Stop doing habits aim to end practices that harm your quality of life or keep you from achieving your most ambitious goals. Several examples of valuable start or stop doing habits are outlined below. These may be exactly what it takes to move past your disability and accomplish great things:

Stop Doing Habits

Littering Your Diet With Sugar

Your diet plays a critical role in how you feel on a day-to-day basis. Proper nutrition is particularly essential if you live with a debilitating illness or disability. Begin by cutting sugar out of your diet as much as possible. Natural sugars from fruit are fine in moderation. Limit candy, cookies and other treats with added sugar.

Living Through Your Television or Mobile Phone

Disability and boredom often go hand in hand. Like many people, you may fill the void with regular binge sessions on Netflix or scrolling endlessly through your news feed on Facebook. Neither habit will

make you feel better in the long-term, and excessive use of social media may fuel depression. Shut down your social media accounts if necessary, or install an app that will force you out after a predetermined period of time.

Procrastinating

Procrastination holds us back from building habits—but it's a habit in and of itself. When you feel overwhelmed, it may be tempting to avoid essential tasks. Instead, break difficult projects into chunks and complete the first item on your to-do list, no matter how small.

Start Doing Habits

Positive Self-Talk

For one day (or even just one hour) commit to writing down every thought about yourself that enters your head. Later, look over these thoughts to determine whether they're mostly positive, negative, or neutral.

Chances are, you typically think of yourself in negative terms. Although this habit can be categorized as stop doing (quit insulting yourself!) , it may help to set a goal of repeating a positive mantra throughout your day. Positive thoughts might feel forced at first, but they'll eventually crowd out that knee-jerk negativity.

Meditate

Positive affirmations don't work for everybody. A select subset of individuals find that, rather than making them feel better, these thoughts simply bring about even more negative ruminations. Give positive thinking a try, but if it doesn't work, try meditation instead.

Focus on deep breathing and observe negative thoughts impartially as they float by. The more you meditate, the easier you'll find it to clear your head of problematic mental chatter.

Exercise

Your physical disability may make regular exercise seem impossible or unnecessary. In reality, the more you move your body, the better you'll feel—both physically and mentally. Commit to an exercise routine you can maintain. Start small; try a YouTube workout designed for beginners, or stroll around the block with a close friend. Don't exercise with the simple goal of burning calories: incorporate strength training and stretching into your routine.

By ditching problematic habits and building positive new ones, you can gain a better sense of autonomy and self-satisfaction. This newfound confidence will help you overcome difficult aspects of living with a disability.

Reclaiming Your Independence

On the 4th of July, Americans celebrate the independence achieved from the British in 1776. As a nation, we now enjoy a strong, independent identity. Unfortunately, however, independence is not a reality for millions of Americans, who feel sidelined by illness or injury. Disability need not equal helplessness; reclaim your autonomy with these tactics:

Volunteer and Make a Difference For Those Less Fortunate

No matter how much suffering you've endured, somebody else has it worse. Lend those less fortunate a hand through volunteerism. Whether you commit to regular hours with a local soup kitchen or participate in a one-off event such as packing for Feed My Starving Children, your efforts will make a difference for those in need. You'll emerge feeling grateful for the many blessings—no matter how small—in your day-to-day life.

Work Remote or Take on a Freelance Position

Physical limitations may keep you from taking on full-time employment in a traditional workplace setting, but thanks to modern technology, you can continue to achieve professional fulfillment. Consider working from home or taking on the occasional freelance gig. In addition to earning income to supplement your disability benefits, you'll regain the sense of purpose you lost when you gave up your previous position.

Work With a Physical Therapist or Personal Trainer

The longer you hold off on physical recovery, the more difficult you'll find it to get started when your benefits finally arrive. Schedule an appointment with your physical therapist or personal trainer; you'll learn a variety of exercises for regaining your strength and range of motion.

Exercise in the Pool

Despite working faithfully with your personal trainer, boredom can set in quickly if physical limitations keep you from your favorite activities. You might enjoy greater freedom in the pool, which accommodates all shapes, sizes and physical capabilities. Look for swimming pools with special ramps or zero depth entry areas; you can easily find one at your local community center or YMCA. Whether you swim laps, participate in water aerobics or simply walk back and forth in the pool, you'll love working out on your own terms.

Find a New Hobby

Your disability may prevent you from pursuing certain activities, but there's no reason to spend all your time watching television or surfing the web. From knitting to woodworking, several hobbies require little in terms of mobility. Adaptive programs make others—such as dance, yoga or swimming—more accessible than you previously assumed.

Find New Ways to Get Around

In a car-based society, the inability to drive can be a real liability for work and socializing. Thankfully, numerous options exist for getting around. Explore your region's public transit system. Consider moving to a home or apartment with direct bus route access. Download Uber or Lyft to use as backup when buses or light rail are unavailable.

Join a Support Group

It's easy to make excuses for your lack of autonomy when you isolate yourselves from others, but if regularly exposed to people with disabilities, you'll quickly realize that those with greater barriers accomplish far more than you ever thought possible. These determined individuals will inspire you to broaden your horizons and take on new challenges. They'll support you in these new endeavors and be your shoulder to cry on, should you experience temporary setbacks.

Disability may force you to make certain accommodations, but it shouldn't completely destroy your independence. Take steps now to reassert your autonomy. Greater satisfaction will accompany your newfound freedom, with or without your disability.

Conclusion

You hurt your back at work, possibly permanently. Your next steps could be long, painful and unexpected. In this ebook, we've attempted to catalogue your challenges, so you can deal with them intelligently. Nothing can turn back time and undo the damage. But with the tools and insights you've gained, hopefully, the process of recovery will be a little less intimidating and the way forward clearer.

Workers' compensation can give you much needed funds to pay for emergency treatment, rehabilitative care and time off work. The road to getting this compensation, though, can be rocky. Claim denial happens too frequently, and dealing with the insurance company the right way isn't always simple.

Our team at The Bader Law Firm LLC Law Firm is standing by to help fill in the gaps—to fight for your rights to get fair compensation and help you feel back in control. Call us now at (678) 562-5595, or visit us online at www.thebaderlawfirm.com to schedule a free consultation. We wish you the best on your journey to wellness and productivity.

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