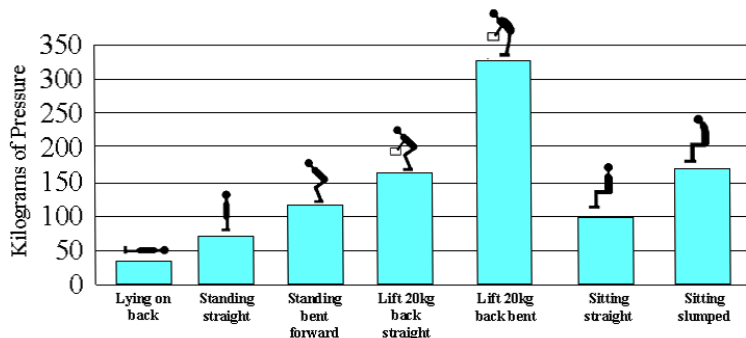


# simple tips for a healthy back

The lumbar spine's optimal position is with a gentle inwards curve or **lordosis**, also referred to as the **neutral spine** position. In this position, the lumbar vertebrae are symmetrically aligned, with weight being borne evenly through the front, back and sides of the vertebral column.

When you bend forward, the vertebrae move together at the front and "gap" apart at the back, pushing the disc's contents backwards towards the major nerves, and significantly increasing pressure in the disc. The longer the bent position is sustained without a rest or reversal, the more the pressure builds up.



This graph shows the amount of disc pressure with every day positions and movements. Injuries are commonly related to higher disc pressures caused by spending prolonged periods with the back bent (e.g. Vacuuming, gardening, sitting slumped) or poor lifting technique.

Follow these simple rules to help protect your back from injury:

- **Positioning yourself so the lumbar lordosis is maintained**
  - Avoid sitting in soft/saggy lounge chairs without low back support
  - Sit at your desk in an ergonomic adjustable chair, with your buttocks well back in the chair so that the lumbar support firmly abuts your low back's concavity
  - Placing a cushion/rolled towel in the small of your back in the car if lumbar support is poor, or for long journeys
  - Kneeling on all fours in the garden to weed – one hand on the ground to support your weight and the other working closely in front of you; sticking your buttocks gently up so that the protective downwards curve in the low back is maintained.
  - Vacuum by lunging forward and back at the knees with a neutral spine rather than bending and hingeing at the low back. It can be helpful to loop the vacuum tube around your low back to remind you to stay upright
- **Regularly reverse the bent posture before pressure builds up in the back of the disc causing pain**
  - Stop hourly on long car journeys to walk around the vehicle and gently arch backwards in standing 5-6 times (i.e. reversing the pressure build up)
  - Alternate tasks in the garden so you are regularly switching to work at different heights
- **When lifting, position the load close to you**  
Squat or kneel onto one knee to lift with the legs, maintaining a neutral spine
- **Push, don't pull loads**  
Line yourself up in the direction of movement so that you are not twisting, and check that your lumbar spine is not bent (you may need to kneel on one knee and push if low)

If you would like to borrow our video on tips for optimal positioning for activities of daily living, please ask! Peter also specialises in ergonomic advice - assessing and optimising office/workstation set ups to minimise spinal strain.