

Be your own  
**BACK GURU**

**7 Simple Ways  
to Beat Back Pain**

**Dr Chris Chin**

*I would like to dedicate this book to  
my wonderful wife Fiona for her support  
and to my children Alastair and Ethan.*

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Finally, I would like to thank all my patients who have come to me for help to overcome their chronic pain. Part 4 and 5 of the book address all the activities they have told me have caused them pain or made their pain worse and, collectively, this convinced me that I needed to write a book for all the other people out there, so they may learn from these experiences and overcome their own problems with back pain.

## ***Preface***

Do you get back pain? Are you at risk of back pain? Why does your back pain keep coming back? No matter what you have tried, medications, physical therapy, exercises, injections and even surgery, sooner or later your back pain comes back and that is because, until now, no one knew precisely what causes back pain. You may know which structure is causing the pain such as, muscles, joints, discs, ligaments or fractures, but this book goes much further. It presents a revolutionary new theory on how the back structures get damaged in the first place, and why back pain keeps coming back, even after treatment or surgery.

This book will completely change the treatment of back pain forever. This theory makes all previous advice given to back pain sufferers obsolete. The theory has evolved through my experience in treating the hundreds of people who in the last twenty years have come to me for back pain management.

Before this theory was developed, we were unable to give specific advice on how to avoid back pain, as we did not know the cause. For the first time, by following specific advice, we are now able to treat as well as prevent back pain.

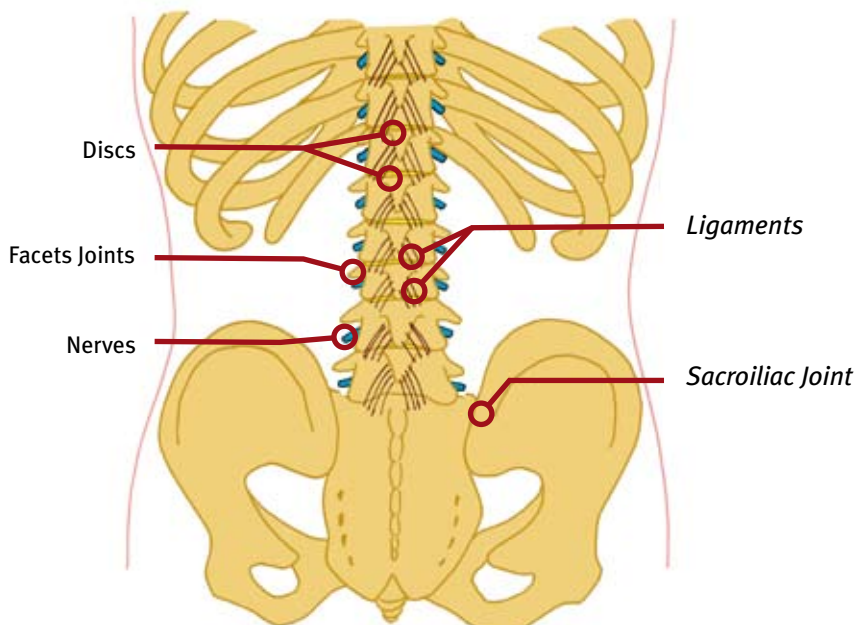
The theory is supported by current evidence on the causes of back pain. I have also presented my ideas to health practitioners and the general public at seminars and conferences and, in September 2004, I was awarded for the best scientific paper at an international medical acupuncture conference.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## Do you suffer from back pain?

*This book looks at back pain from a completely new angle, and it has the information needed by everyone who suffers from back pain. The illustrations and photographs will help you understand how changes to the way you move, work, exercise or rest can prevent flaring-up your pain or damaging your back. It will also help to avoid back pain in the future.*

### Lumbar spine



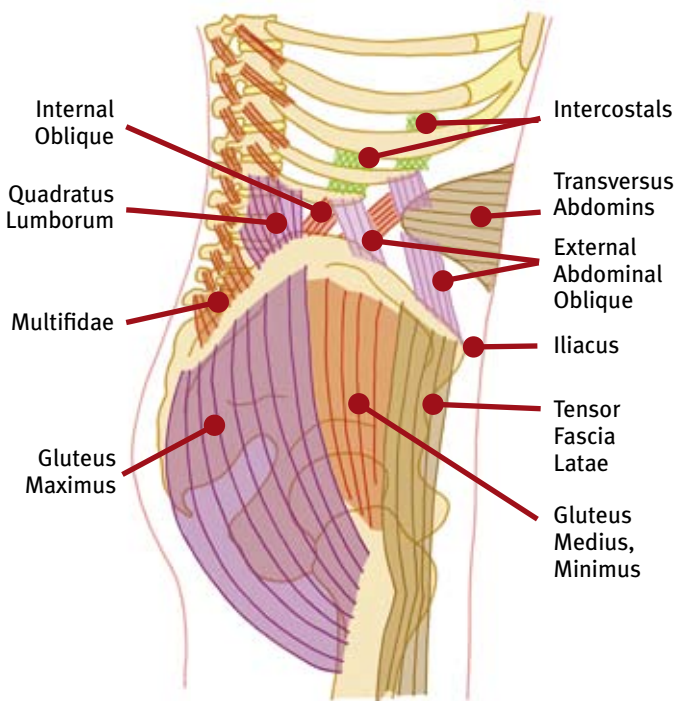
*These structures are commonly blamed for causing back pain*

## What can back pain do to you?

Back pain is variable. Some people get over it, some don't, and each attack may be worse than the one before. Research shows that 70 to 90 per cent of people will get better after three months, but other research shows that between 20 and 80 per cent of people will get back pain again within one year. Eighty per cent will get back pain some time in their lives and fifty per cent of people who are going to get back pain will get it before the age of 30. 36 per cent of the adult population has back pain.

For some people back pain will keep recurring, or their back will give them a little twinge now and then, and this limits the type of activities they are able to do.

### Core Stabiliser Muscles that support the spine



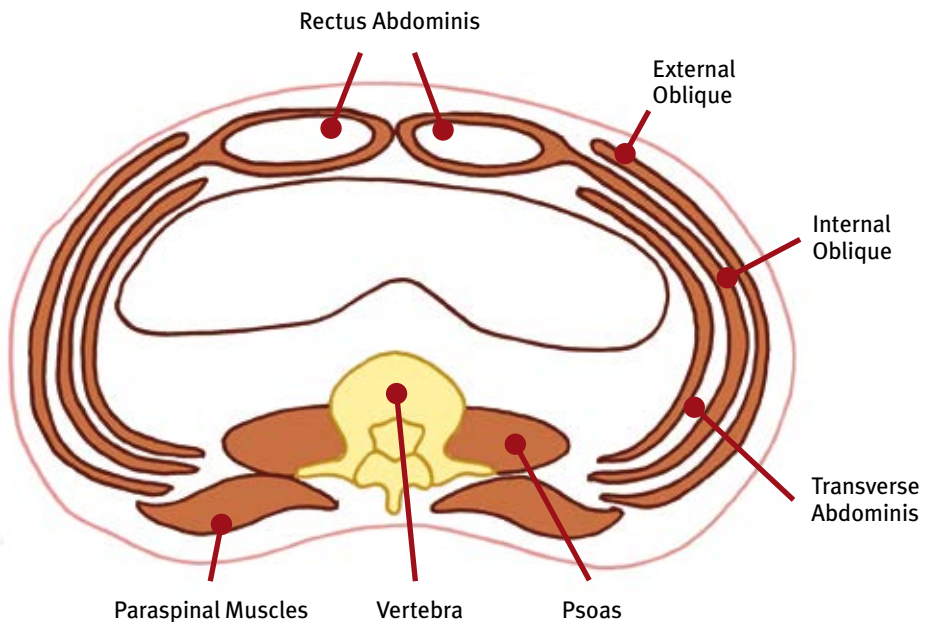
*All the muscles in this illustration have been implicated in the cause of back pain and it is often said they are in 'spasm', imbalance, or that they develop trigger points that cause referred pain to the back.*

## Are you suffering in silence?

The worst part is that back pain is not visible and so most people suffer in silence. As others cannot see your disability there may be no empathy and few offers of assistance. There is also the stigma that the pain is exaggerated to avoid work or to claim compensation.

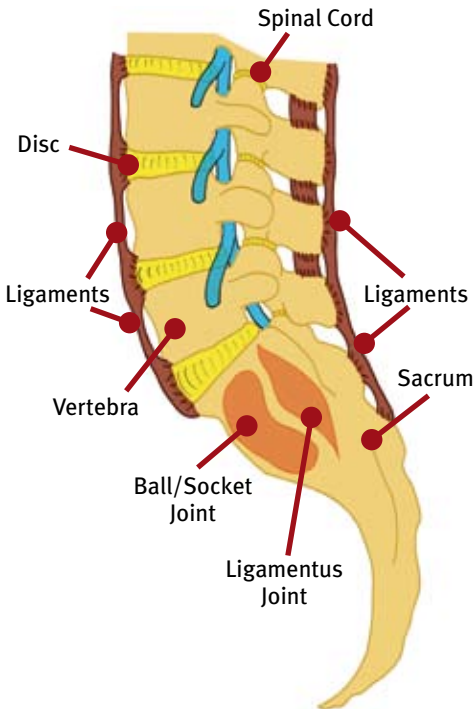
Other people suffer in silence because they do not want their bosses or insurance companies to know they have back pain. They fear they may lose their jobs, have difficulty finding new employment or obtaining income protection insurance.

### Cross section of the core stabiliser muscles that support the spine



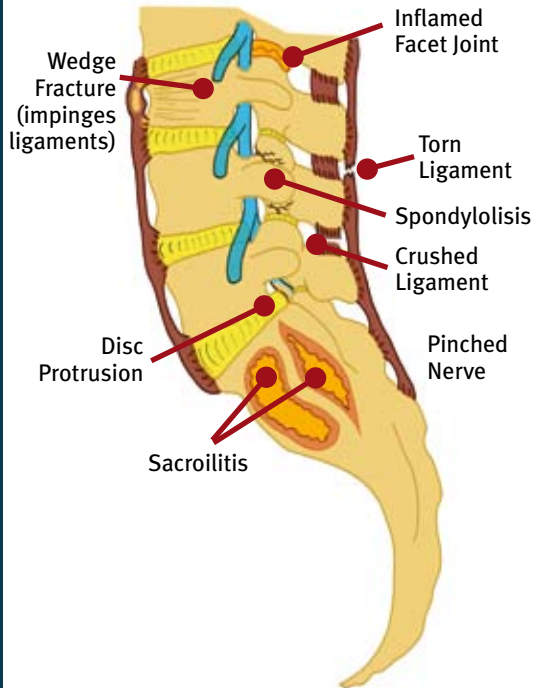
*These muscles act like a band to support the spine and prevent the upper body from sagging onto the pelvis*

### Healthy spine



*This spine is protected by healthy supportive muscles*

### Injured spine



*Spinal degeneration occurs when muscles are not functioning properly*

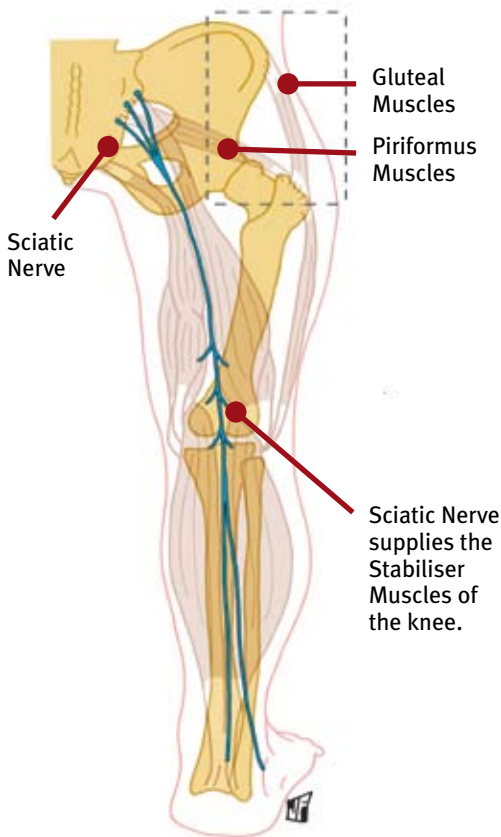
## It can get worse

To the person with the occasional attack of back pain, if you ignore the problem the pain may eventually become worse or more frequent. Apart from losing your health, your fitness disappears together with your quality of life and your finances will be strained, especially if surgery is required. The pain is a sign that something is wrong. Listen to your body. Don't just ignore it, find out what is it you are doing that is aggravating your pain and do as much as you can to prevent it from recurring"

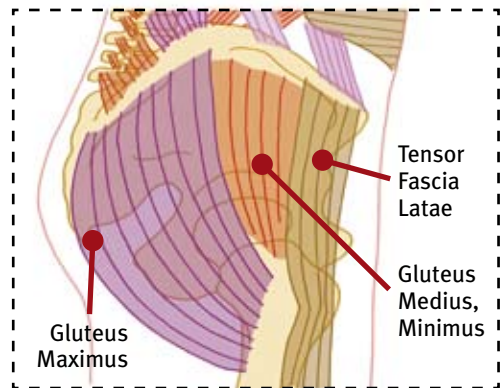
## Do you have hip pain, sciatica, cramps or pains in your leg?

As a medical practitioner, many people come to me with hip pain, pain travelling down the side of their leg to the ankle, down the back of the thigh or calf. In general, we call these pains sciatica. Sometimes the pain is caused by the sciatic nerve being pinched in the spine, but usually it comes from trigger points in the strained muscles of the hip, which cause referred pain down the leg. This is a very common condition associated with back pain.

### Causes of sciatica



### Gluteal muscles



*Most people think that sciatic is caused by a pinched sciatic nerve or its nerve roots at the lumbar.*

*In practice, sciatica is more likely to be due to referred pain from the gluteal attachment to the hip (iliac crest)*

## ***Back pain increases risk of sports injury***

Do you suffer from sports injuries? Do you have difficulty recovering from your injuries, or does treatment give you only temporary or partial relief so that your sports injury keeps coming back. Or do you keep getting new injuries, especially knee or groin injuries?



*People with back problems have a higher risk of other sports injuries*



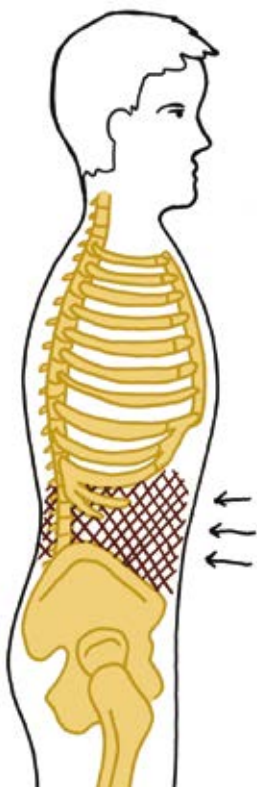
*People with back problems have a higher risk of hip, knee and foot problems*

A recent study of weekend participants of sports in Australia shows that having a back problem is the most important predictor of developing a sports injury; they have a 70 per cent higher risk of sustaining another injury. People with weak backs and damaged stabiliser muscles will be prone to increased injury risk in any activity they do.

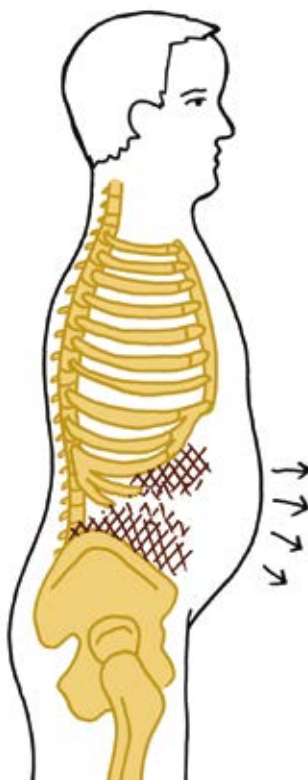
## ***Do you look great but you still have a stomach that still sticks out?***

Have you been working out and losing weight, but your belly is still sticking out too much? Or do you have a bulge in the lower abdomen below your belly button? This may be partly due to the damage to the abdominal muscles. Some common exercises such as sit-ups, advised for strengthening the back or abdominal muscles, can also cause damage to these muscles at their origins along the lower ribs. This book will give you alternative exercises to strengthen those muscles without crushing them.

**Abdominal muscles  
functioning ideally**



**Abdominal muscles  
not functioning ideally**





*A strong healthy back will improve the chances of a longer, more active and rewarding life*

### ***Five good reasons to change***

1. Greater chance of your back pain getting better and less chance of the pain coming back
2. Stronger healthier back for improved posture and sports performance
3. Less risk of other sports injuries, arthritis and osteoporosis
4. Look and feel younger with good posture and a slimmer waist
5. Better quality of life and with fewer mental problems.

## ***Have you found someone who can give you pain relief?***

There are medications, as well as therapeutic programs, which may give you temporary pain relief, but do not treat the actual cause of your back pain.

This book is intended to complement any therapy you may be using to assist you in seeking a permanent solution to your back pain. In my experience people tend to shop around until they find a handful of health professionals, or a complementary therapist who will provide them with relief.

Adding the knowledge gained from this book to your current treatment, and modifying your exercise program to avoid aggravating the cause of your back pain, should improve your chances of overcoming your pain and prevent, or reduce, future flare-ups or recurrences.



*Ensure that any recommended exercise does not inadvertently damage or strain your abdominal muscles*



## ***Back pain getting worse instead of better?***

If you suffer from occasional back pain or stiffness during or after exercise, whether exercising by yourself using a method from a book or video, or in an exercise class with professional supervision, this new theory will help you choose or modify exercises so that there is less chance of causing or aggravating back injury or weakening your abdominal muscles. This will enable you to continue exercising to strengthen your muscles, prevent osteoporosis and maintain your health.

Pain can develop during exercise, or from three hours or up to three days later. This is because it can take some time for joints to get inflamed or for strained or crushed muscles to spasm-up.

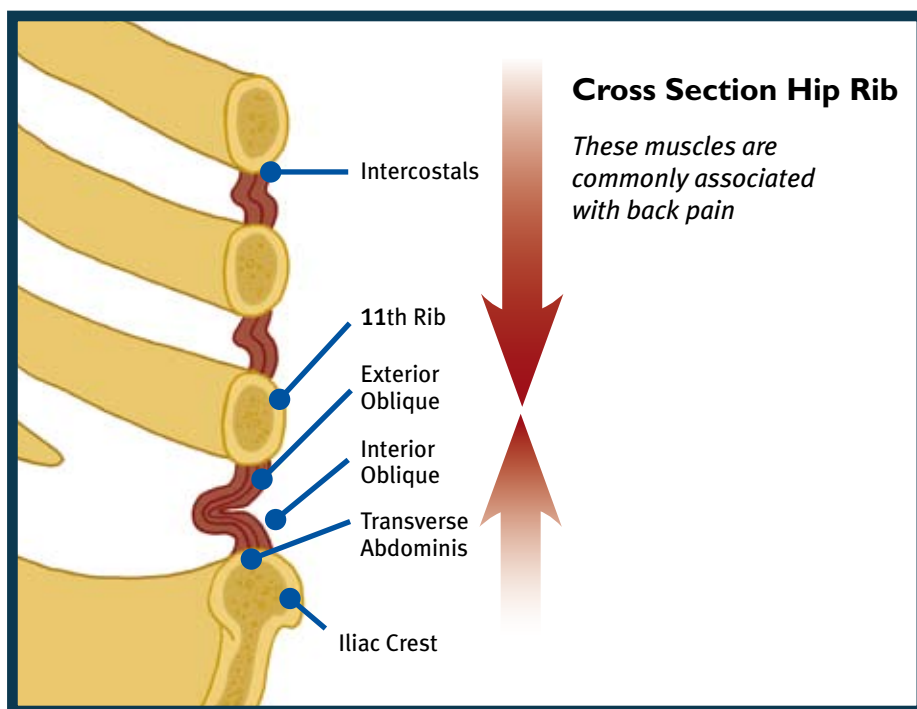
# Chapter I

## Muscle spasm and Myofascial Trigger Points

Most people who have back pain do not have anything seriously wrong with their spine. Nine out of ten people with lower back pain either have no abnormalities that show on MRI scans, or they have changes related only to spinal degeneration. Recent studies have shown there is no correlation between spinal degeneration and back pain.

Nine out of ten people suffer from so-called common back pain. Other terms used are mechanical back pain, musculoskeletal back pain and back pain of unknown origin. Recent studies have shown that this back pain is due to muscle spasm and the presence of Myofascial Trigger Points.

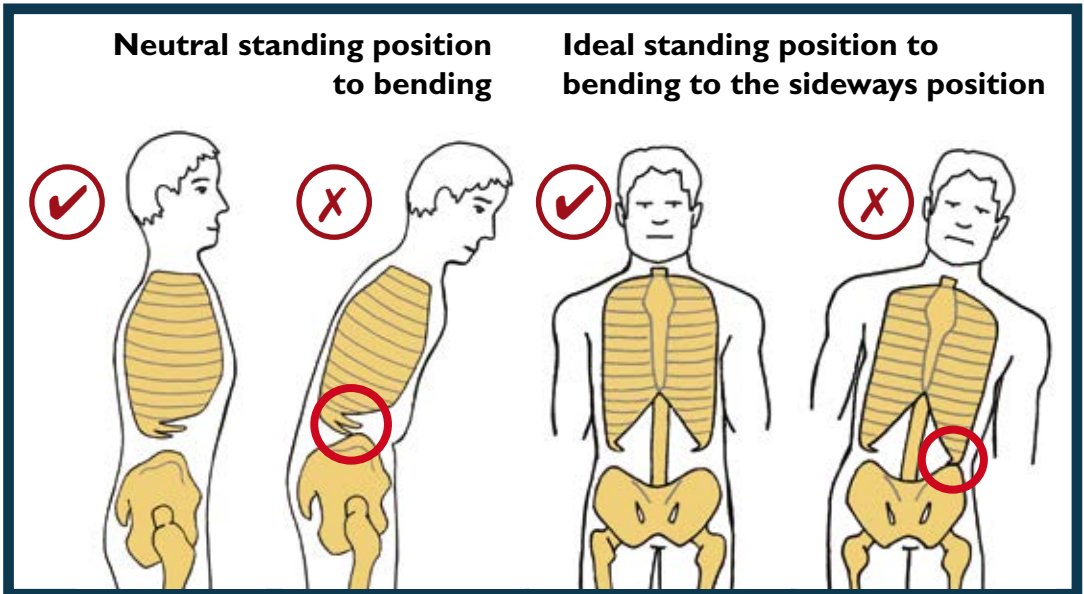
Myofascial Trigger Points are distinct nodules found in muscle that causes tightening, spasm, weakness and pain. Injury to the muscle or myofascia causes the development of trigger points. Hip rib impingement or impaction is the common cause of injury to the myofascia of the core stabiliser muscles of the lower back.



## The Hip Rib Impingement Syndrome

### So what happens?

So how does poor posture cause back pain? My theory is that when we slouch forward or bend sideways, our lower ribs squash all the abdominal muscles between the rib cage and the top of the hip bone in the loin area (iliac crest). When this happens it crushes the abdominal muscles in the loin and at the same time strains the postural muscles in the back. These muscles suddenly become weak and the spine loses its protection and becomes vulnerable to damage by the sheer weight of the body or by an injury such as an accident or a fall.



The severity of injury to the spine and supporting structures are dependent on numerous factors. These include the severity of hip rib impaction or impingement, the strength of the bones, joints, discs, ligaments, supporting muscles relative to the weight of the person. The duration of impaction, frequency of impaction and the body position during impactions can also determine the severity of injury and pain.