Anatomy of the Healthy Back

A healthy back is strong and flexible. It supports your upper body and protects your spinal cord. Attached to your backbone (spine) are muscles and ligaments that help the body move. The back has three natural curves: the neck (cervical) curve, the upper back (thoracic) curve, and the lower back (lumbar) curve. Each curve is made up of bones (vertebrae) and pads of soft tissue (disks). The lumbar curve has five vertebrae (L1 through L5). It is often where people have back pain. To be healthy, your back’s three curves should be aligned in a balanced position. To do this, they need to be supported by strong muscles.

Poor Posture, Excess Weight, and Lack of Exercise

These can be your back’s worst enemies. Poor posture puts unwanted pressure on disks and vertebrae, which can strain the back. It also makes you more likely to use your back in the wrong way and injure it. Excess weight adds to the pressure on your back. And too little exercise weakens the muscles that support your spine.
Practical Applications

Lifting

Bend your knees, not your back!
Always be sure of your footing.
Lift with your legs.
Hold objects close to your body.
Lift objects only chest-high.
Get help with heavy loads.

Driving

Adjust your car seat so that knees are at or just below hip level.
Sit upright and drive with both hands on the wheel.
Shift weight often.
Keep back pockets empty.

Place a lumbar support or a rolled-up towel behind your lower back for support.