

To the bone: addressing orthopaedic disorders

Orthopaedics, as a clinical discipline, is often misunderstood, and had this not been the case, this particular health problem would not have been so common in our society.

“Roughly 90 percent of people above the age of 50 experience back pain and neck pain,” said Professor Shah Alam, a leading orthopaedic specialist, referring to the severity of the ailment in the country. And that does not mean that sufferers are exclusively within that age bracket.

We have all experienced joint or muscle pain at some point in our lives. Whether it was a viral fever or something more serious, physical pain is something we all want to avoid.

Professor Alam feels that as far as seeking medical help is concerned, people suffering from orthopaedic problems are often unaware, negligent even, and by the time they seek help a lot of the damage is already done. He also indicated that disorders are often misdiagnosed for the lack of understanding as to whom the patients should approach.

As with most illnesses people often seek to solve problems with medication alone, once again oblivious to the fact that being a little careful in our day to day life may go a long way, as far as preventing, or treating, orthopaedic disorders are concerned.

BREAKING IT DOWN

From congenital birth defects resulting in unusual number of fingers, to rickets in children, sprains, back pain, and even osteoporosis — which is one of the most common ailments in women, orthopaedic disorder is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of clinical conditions involving the skeleton system — the limbs and the spine, and associated structures like muscles and ligaments.

Often the pain is temporary; or recurring. And at times excruciating.

Chronic orthopaedic ailments can affect our sleep cycles, interfere with work, and over time can lead to anxiety and even depression.

Most often than not, the initial symptoms are trivial, and are often overlooked. Sometimes, the pain is felt only while trying to bend forward, sit on the floor, or climb stairs. In cases of injury, swellings, bruises are often quick indications that clinical help should be sought.

COMMON CAUSES

There are many contributing factors that can lead to orthopaedic problems. From lack of proper physical activities, to diet, and age — there can be multiple factors contributing to particular orthopaedic problems, and a holistic approach is necessary for diagnosis, sometimes even while treating physical injuries.

Slouching

Either at a desk, the dinner table, while watching television, driving or riding the passenger seat — we slouch all the time. When this becomes a habit, it can lead to back and neck pain, not to mention bad postures giving the body a bulkier look.

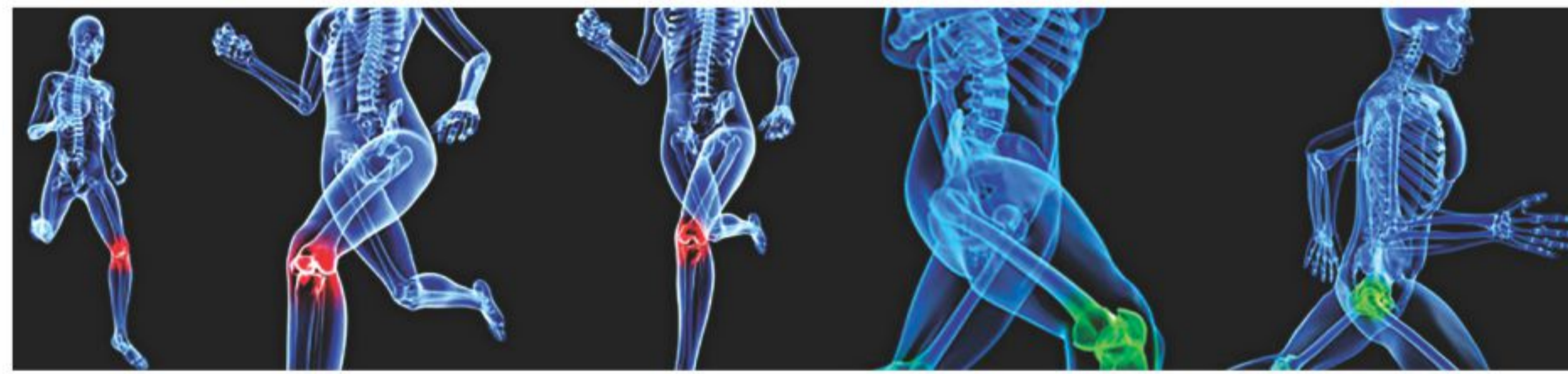
Back supports and seat cushions can help a person get their posture back, and prevent slouching. These can be taken to work, as well as using them regularly at home.

The wrong footwear

Neither complete flats nor heels are good for the back. High heels force an arch on the back which puts pressure on the spine, whereas complete flats with thin soles lack arch support, which can send the body weight right into the feet while walking, subsequently resulting pain in the feet and legs. The perfect pair of shoes is one with soft soles that cushion the feet, and provides adequate support. Small broad heels are recommended and are better for the body than complete flats or flips flops.

Lazing out

“Laziness has to be fixed; this is one of the main problems of today's generation. They do not move around as much, and low activities worsen orthopaedic conditions” said Professor Alam. Most children do not have enough space to play around because of the lack of grounds and remain inactive in their home.



Our regular lifestyles now hardly involve any rigorous physical movements, and all of it can slowly contribute to orthopaedic problems. Small changes like riding a bike, walking to work and taking the stairs can help improve conditions, and also prevent them.

Lifting without care

People, even younger ones, should be careful while bending forward or making quick bodily movements. Lifting heavy objects without adjusting the position of the legs can compress the spinal discs leading to back pain and even spinal injury.

One should keep a wide base of support with their legs, squat down bending at the hips and knees, keep shoulders apart so that the back remains straight, and lift objects by keeping it as close to the body as possible.

Ignorance is not always bliss

Ignoring your back pain will neither make it

go away nor will it cure itself. It needs proper medical consultation and the right treatment, preferably in the initial stages. Otherwise, the minor knee pain and 'slight pain' in your back can become chronic and result in a lot of associated complications which could have easily been avoided.

Professions and pain

To quote professor Alam, “Professions and pain are related”, and it is no mystery. People who have desk jobs and are required to remain seated in front of the computer for instance, are more prone to developing back and neck pain than people involved in some physical movement at work.

“We may not be able to change our jobs, but we can surely change our habits. Leaning back more and curving front less can help with posture, getting up every few hour or so and taking a small walk can also help reduce chances of back pain. It is also

There are numerous other ways to relieve pain — applying heat to source of the pain, physiotherapy and medication.

Diet plays an important role in prevention; an eating plan comprising large portions of small fish, and spinach for instance, can help prevent/reduce orthopaedic problems, whereas meals rich in fat and 'fast food' can aggravate the problem.

Supplements of calcium and vitamin D are recommended by Professor Shah Alam for anyone who is suffering from such conditions, or even simply to prevent it.

“Women are at a greater risk of developing osteoporosis than men. With age their bones start to lose mass, and hence should be more concerned and be more active from an early age as it can help increase bone mass. In case of children, they should be exposed to adequate amounts of sunlight to naturally produce vitamin D,” opined Dr Alam.

No matter the extent of the ailment, or

WHERE TO GET THEM

There are multiple places where you can find medical equipment and accessories related to orthopaedics. Back supports can be found at Aziz Super Medicine Market, 1st floor, Shahbag, and also beside National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR). Prices range between Tk 500 and Tk 1000.

Apex Foam (623/1 Begam Rokeya Sarani Rd) also has mattresses suitable for people suffering from back pain. Prices, per cubic feet, will cost around Tk 1300. Apex also carries pillows costing Tk 1000-1300 (depending on sizes).

Mostofa Mart, Bashundhara City carries memory foam pillows as well, costing around Tk 3000. They also have pillows that keep the head cool at night with a layer of gel, which costs around Tk 4500.



very important to keep the back supported at all times,” suggested Dr Alam.

He also added, reiterating the relation with work and orthopaedic issues, “Even traffic policemen face certain problems as prolonged periods of standing can put pressure on their hips to carry the weight of the whole body for long, resulting in back pain”.

Going to the mattresses

A good mattress is one that is not too hard and not too soft, and most importantly, uniform so it does not affect your back. Pillows should also not be too soft, nor too firm; of medium height, and made of cotton.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

“Exercise is very important, especially from a very young age,” said Professor Alam. However, the manner one should exercise must be supervised or suggested by a professional.

the level of pain, according to Professor Alam, with the right medication, exercise and a change in lifestyle, even a complete cure is possible. To achieve such a result, one must consult a professional as soon as the symptoms are felt.

Relieving pain is not something that can be done in a day, but it is your attitude that can make the difference between long time suffering and permanent cure

By Anisha Hassan

Photo: Collected

Special thanks to Professor Shah Alam, a specialist in Orthopaedics (Bone, Joint, Fractures), MBBS, MS (Ortho), FCPS (Surgery), FRCS (Ortho), Spine & Orthopaedic Surgeon, at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR). He is also associated with Bangladesh Spine and Orthopaedic Hospital, 43/R/4, West Panthapath, Dhaka.