

# Limber that lumbar to end backaches

Weak muscles cause many back problems, teacher says

By Nick Leyva  
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Not many people give much thought to their backs — until they begin to hurt, that is. But steps can be taken to prevent pains that develop from using the back incorrectly in everyday activities, according to Leisure World's leading authority on the back.

Diane Edwards estimates that 15 percent of the people with back pain suffer from some type of structural damage to the spine while 85 percent suffer from weak musculature in the posterior and abdominal areas. These numbers apply to all ages, not just the elderly, she said.

But there is hope for sufferers, and Edwards can help. She instructs a 16-week class for people who suffer back ailments that are common among Leisure World residents. The class is designed to alleviate problems in the lower back and neck areas, Edwards said.

"The three biggest problems people in my class have are lack of strength in the posterior muscles, (lack of) flexibility in that area such as the lower back, and osteoporosis," said Edwards, of Mission Viejo, who teaches the Monday afternoon class in the Clubhouse 1 mini-gym. "We start the class very slowly and each week add a new exercise that they can practice at home.

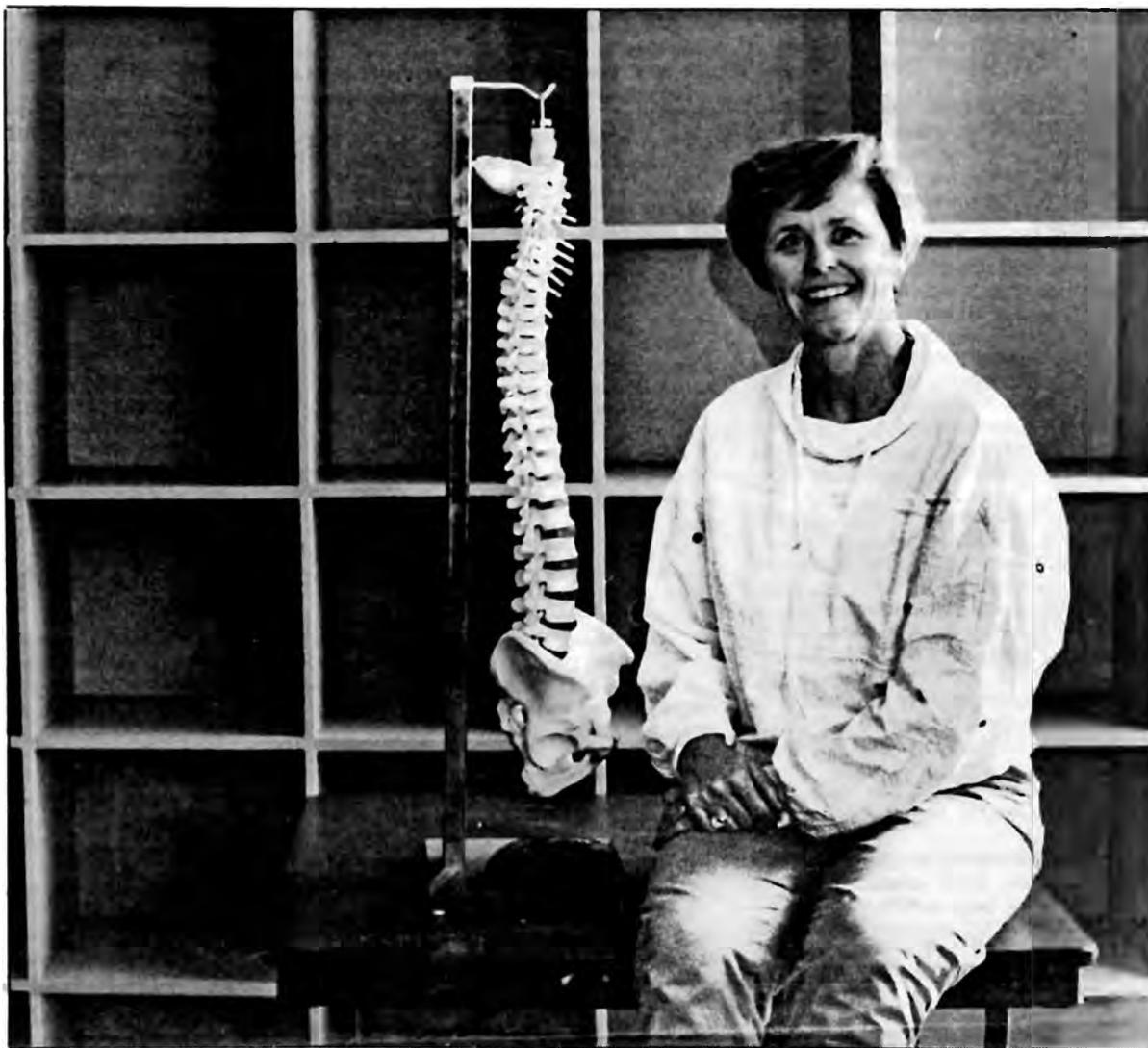
"It's amazing how many people come up to me after the eighth or ninth week and tell me how much better they feel, not just in the back but their whole body. I tell them if they are willing to put the time in, they will soon find themselves feeling a whole lot better."

The class, run through Saddleback College, begins with Edwards lecturing about the spinal column, and the muscles, nerves and bones that surround the area as well as instructions on how to lift items properly. The lights are then turned off to relax the class and exercises begin for the 50 people enrolled, she said.

"We start out with simple exercises and work very slowly and methodically," said Edwards, a physical education professor who has been a full-time instructor at Clubhouse 1 for 12 years. "As the course goes on, I add a new exercise each week and we can do them all in the class time we have. I encourage the people to do these exercises at home also."

The class finishes with a "relaxation period" in which the student may wind down, Edwards said.

"I also give out sheets of instructions for the new exercises each week and people can also



Diane Edwards uses this model of the spine to help Leisure Worlders understand their backs.

take home a cassette tape with my voice telling them what to do," she said.

Some of the exercises the class learns are designed to add flexibility in the lower back, strengthen the posterior and the abdominal muscles, and teach exercises for proper posture, Edwards said.

"A lot of the people I get in here do not have good posture and need some instructions on what to do," she said. "Many people, especially the men, do not have the flexibility in the lower back muscles. It has something to do with society and the way men were brought up to play sports like football and wrestling. Their muscles are so compacted, and they have narrower pelvises that disallow them that flexibility.

"The women are much more flexible because they were brought up to study ballet and gymnastics.

They are much leaner with longer legs as a rule, and that enables them to have more flexibility."

Besides her back conditioning class, Edwards also teaches classes in general conditioning, mild (chair) conditioning, water exercise and aerobic conditioning. She also teaches a weight control lecture class. The water exercise class is conducted in a swimming pool.

"The water exercise class also is good for people with back trouble because the buoyancy (of the water) can help those people who find it hard to lie on the floor and do the exercises," she said.

"The main point people must remember is that you do not have to live with back pain," Edwards said. "All it takes is some time to do the exercises and learn how to properly lift things to get rid of the pain."