

Spring into a Healthier You

Although anytime is a good time to make healthy life changes, there's just something about the spring that makes it the perfect time to put some healthy back into your life. Below are a few of our best tips to get you started.

Increase Your Physical Activity

Activity Aim for 30 minutes a day five times a week and just get moving! Take a stroll around the neighborhood and find out what's blooming or lace up your boots, grab your pack and head to the nearest hiking trail or nature preserve to enjoy the great outdoors. There are so many health positives associated with increasing your activity level – reducing your risk of developing heart disease, lowering your blood pressure and reducing stress just to name a few.

Up Your Fruit and Veggie Intake

Intake Eat fresh! The USDA recommends adults eat 5 to 9 servings of fruit and vegetables per day. A high intake of fruits and vegetables has shown tremendous health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart attack, stroke, cancer and premature death. To maximize your intake try eating 3 to 4 veggie servings with both lunch and dinner and 1 to 2 servings of fruit or veggie with breakfast and as a snack.

Schedule Annual Check-Ups

Call your doctor's office and book any annual appointments you've been putting off. Maybe you haven't had your cholesterol and blood pressure checked in years. Perhaps you're overdue for an eye exam or it's time for a mammogram. Stop procrastinating and get them scheduled, for your health and peace of mind!



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THE WORLD SPRINGS ANEW

Ahhh, sweet springtime. A time of renewal and rebirth, year after year, when things are fresh and new. The world around us seems to come back to life before our very eyes as the trees bud and flowers bloom. Spring's warm breezes and longer days float in like music to the soul after the cold, short days of winter and signal that spring has sprung.

In addition to warmer days and blooming things, spring also brings with it the tradition of a top to bottom cleaning of our homes. Though spring cleaning has some religious and cultural origins, the spring cleaning ritual that most of us practice today comes from a time when homes were heated with wood or coal burning fire places and lit with oil lamps. A winter season of using those items to keep your home warm and well-lit left everything coated with a layer of soot. Spring was the first opportunity to open the windows and air the place out. Wiping everything down and cleaning floors, rugs and curtains naturally followed. These days we are more likely getting rid of a layer of dust from our neglected

bookshelves than a winter's accumulation of soot, but the tradition of spring cleaning continues.

In this edition of *SpineTimes* we cover all things spring, including how to allergy proof your home, navigate the farmers market like a pro and create your own herb garden. Because spring is the perfect time to turn over a new leaf, we've also included some tips on how to put some healthy back in your life.

If you have children in school, this season also means Spring Break is in your future. If you suffer from back pain, whether you plan on taking a road trip or a flight, be sure to check out our article on how to avoid it while traveling.

From all of us here at Spine Institute of Central Florida, we hope everything comes up roses for you this spring!



A Word from Our President and Medical Director

Welcome and thank you for choosing Spine Institute of Central Florida (SICF) for your spine health and orthopaedic needs. We are committed to and passionate about providing the most comprehensive care to our wonderful community.

We are so glad you're here and hope 2019 is your best year yet!

~ Dr. Chukwuka Okafor



Provider Spotlight:

Meet Dr. Maria R. Otero-Suria

Meet Maria R. Otero-Suria, MD, MPH, Psy.D, a Licensed Clinical Psychologist here at Spine Institute of Central Florida. Dr. Otero is well versed in the use of clinical psychological interventions to help reduce perceived pain and the reliance on opioid medications in patients suffering from Chronic Pain. Having previously worked as a medical consultant, physician, and physician-psychologist in her career, and prior to her current role as a licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Otero is one of the most well-rounded and highly trained providers in her field.

Dr. Otero received her Master of Public Health in Epidemiology in 1994 from the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan, PR. She then went on to receive her Medical Doctor degree in 1998 from San Juan Bautista School of Medicine in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Dr. Otero

then attended Carlos Albizu University in San Juan, PR and received her Master of Science in Psychology in 2008. She received her Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology in 2011 from Carlos Albizu University, a well-recognized Clinical Psychology program that is accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Dr. Otero works with our patients who suffer from chronic pain, injuries, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, opioid addiction, tobacco use disorder, obesity and other such diagnoses that perpetuate and worsen their spinal, musculoskeletal and pain disorders. She is very passionate about helping make a difference in the lives of her patients and provides much needed care to our diverse patient population.

Meet the Team

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Spring Clean Your Life

Spring cleaning doesn't have to stop when you've obliterated that last dust bunny.

Spring cleaning doesn't have to stop at housework. What if you extended that cleaning mindset into other aspects of your life? Spring is the perfect time to re-evaluate your habits and refresh your mind and body!

To refresh your mind, try starting with a digital detox if you're feeling overwhelmed with your virtual life. An overload of messages, online accounts and constant electronic dings can cause you to feel stressed and anxious, just like a cluttered home can. So de-clutter your virtual life and unplug! Unsubscribe to those subscriptions and services you don't use, have a no phones during dinner rule and try turning off all electronic devices

at bedtime. Take a social media break. You might find that doing so will greatly reduce the digital 'noise' in your life. Don't forget to give your mental diet a hard look during this process. We are bombarded with so much information from various sources on a daily basis and it is important to give your brain a break from constantly processing this information. Set aside at least a few minutes each day to daydream, reflect or to just let your mind be still.

Another area you can clean up is your health and there are lots of ways to tackle this chore. The abundance of spring fruits and veggies provides a great opportunity to revitalize your body with fresh nutrients for a boost of energy after winter. Clean out the junk food in your kitchen, replace it with fresh, in-season produce and

then enjoy a spring vegetable stew or a berry topped breakfast bowl. Aim to work on your fitness not just to get fit, but to also be able to do more fun things. Mix up your normal routine and sign up for a mud run with friends or take a Salsa dancing class. Having fun with your fitness routine is the key to sticking with it. Get back to nature and spend some time outside in the spring green surroundings. It's one of the best things you can do for your health thanks to the combo of fresh air, vitamin D producing sunshine and the de-stressing effect of natural environments.

Other areas of your life that might need freshening up include your budget, relationships and attitude. Use the opportunity for a fresh start with spring cleaning wherever you need it!

How to Allergy Proof Your Home

The beauty of spring's budding trees and blooming flowers put it at the top of many folks favorite season list. Although there is one group that might consistently list it as their least favorite – those who suffer from seasonal allergies. All that budding and blooming involves pollen, and for seasonal allergy sufferers, pollen leads to misery. Fortunately, there are some steps you can take to keep pollen under control inside your home.

If you can, stay indoors when the pollen count is very high. Check your local pollen forecast for specifics and keep in mind that the counts usually peak in the mornings from 5 to 9am. Keeping your doors and windows closed during the spring months will help keep allergens out of your home. You can also use an air purifier to help clear allergens and other pollutants from the air. Use HEPA filters in your air purifier, vacuum cleaners and A/C unit. Be sure to clean and replace the air filters in your home often and also clean shelves, vents and other places pollen can collect. Wash your bedsheets at least once a week in very hot water and vacuum well twice a week.

Remember that pollen can collect on your hair and clothes. If you've spent time outside during high pollen activity or on a windy day be sure to change your clothes when you come inside and wash your hair before you get into bed. Pollen can also collect on your pet so wipe them down before allowing them inside and bathe them often. Take your shoes off at the door and ask guests to do the same to avoid tracking pollen around your home.

If pollen has spring at the bottom of your favorite season list, we hope the tips above will help you breathe easier to enjoy the season more.

In Case You Missed It

Spring cleaning your home is pretty self-explanatory and most of us have the routine down pat, but there are some often overlooked areas. See our checklist below for what you might be missing.

✓ Under & Behind Appliances: You probably have no trouble remembering to toss the expired jar of pickles while you wipe your fridge clean and of course you scrubbed the chili from the top of your microwave. But what about underneath the fridge and behind the microwave?

✓ Mattress: We wash our sheets and pillowcases often and usually remember to get to the comforter and pillows when we spring clean. It's also a great time to give your mattress a flip (or rotate top-to-bottom for pillow tops) and a thorough vacuuming.

✓ Your Phone: Trust us, it's filthy. And not just your cell.

Take the time to wipe down all your phones and while you're at it, clean those headphones up too.

✓ Medicine Cabinet & Cosmetics: Medications and beauty products have a shelf-life, just like food. Go through your bathroom and throw out everything that is expired.

✓ Remotes, Door Knobs, Handles & Light Switches: Think of all the hands and all the germs that come in to contact with these items every day. Now go disinfect them.

✓ Utensil Holders & Organizers: When was the last time you cleaned out your silverware organizer or washed your big spoon holder? We don't remember either, it's time.

✓ Purses & Bags: These items go everywhere we do, serve as catchalls and are often placed on the floor. If you can't launder them, take the time to clean out the inside and wipe down the outside with a damp cloth.

Lamb Stew with Spring Vegetables

If you do visit your local farmers market this spring, be sure to grab the fresh veggies for this vibrant and comforting stew. It's perfect to put together and leave simmering on the stove while you enjoy a beautiful spring afternoon outdoors. It will be warm and comforting when the day cools back down and you return indoors, but still full of spring freshness!

Ingredients:

¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 pounds lamb stew meat, cut into 2-inch chunks
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup white wine
1 ½ cups water
2 sprigs fresh rosemary
2 sprigs fresh oregano
2 cups baby carrots, halved
2 cups small new red potatoes, halved
1 cup fresh English peas
2 green onions, thinly sliced

Instructions:

Season lamb with salt and pepper and place in a large bowl. Sprinkle with flour and toss to coat. Heat oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat. Working in batches if needed, add lamb and brown on all sides. Add water, wine, rosemary and oregano. Stir to combine and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer for 1 hour. Stir in carrots and potatoes. Cover and continue to simmer until the potatoes are cooked through, about 45 minutes. Stir in peas. Simmer another 5 to 10 minutes or until peas are just cooked through. Remove and discard stems from rosemary and oregano. Ladle stew into bowls and garnish with green onions.

Recipe from Whole Foods Market Recipe Collections
www.wholefoodsmarket.com



Navigate the Farmers Market Like a Pro

Shopping at your local farmers market has numerous benefits. It's an easy way to eat both locally grown and seasonal produce. You know where the food comes from or you can ask the farmer in front of you if you're not sure. The abundance of stands and offerings might seem overwhelming at first, but there are some guidelines you can follow that will have you perusing the place like a pro in no time.

For the best selection, because the best goods go first, show up early. For the best deals, go late since farmers will sometimes discount their goods in an attempt to avoid taking them back to the farm where they have more gardens ready

for harvest. Keep an open mind and take your time before making your selections. Prices and types of produce offered vary, so it's a good idea to scope out the entire market and see what they have to offer before loading up.

To make the most of your trip don't forget to bring cash and your own bags or a basket for carrying your purchases. Keeping a cooler in your vehicle is a great idea so you can keep fresh items from spoiling in a warm car, in case you want to go back and spend more time at the market or have other stops to make after the market. Be sure to talk to the farmers and ask questions. You can learn about produce you're not familiar with and how to prepare

it, how your food is grown and harvested and what is coming up for harvest in the upcoming weeks. The farmer can also help you pick produce based on when you plan on preparing the item. For example, if you have plans to make a fresh salsa for a get together later in the week, ask the farmer to help you select tomatoes that will be at their peak ripeness in a few days instead of on the day you're purchasing them.

Once you return home with your bounty of fresh finds, be sure to store them properly. Tomatoes, avocados, peppers and apples do great at room temperature. Leafy greens and veggies keep best in a cold fridge drawer with good air circulation.

Create Your Own Herb Garden

Fresh herbs add abundant flavor to any dish and are also a great way to add healthy nutrients to your diet. Grow your own in a sunny windowsill or unused patio corner.

If you enjoy using herbs in your cooking, growing your own can be very rewarding and help save on your grocery bill. Not to mention the convenience of having them at your fingertips anytime you want or need them. You don't have to have an existing garden area or even enough space in your yard to start one. Herbs will happily grow potted in any sunny windowsill and on your patio or balcony. They will also look pretty and smell

great. To get started gather some small pots, soil and head to your local gardening store to purchase some small starter plants, or seeds if you're feeling adventurous. Make sure to purchase herbs you enjoy and will use the most and don't forget to refer to the instructions on each plant for specific care instructions. It's important to pinch the herbs off for use or trim regularly so that they grow more like a bush instead of a stalk.

If having fresh herbs year-round sounds perfect, give growing your own a try. It's a great way to add fresh flavor and more healthful ingredients to your diet while also saving a little money and brightening up your home with greenery.



How to Prevent Back Pain on Your Next Trip

Does the thought of your upcoming Spring Break travel make your back ache?

With Spring Break on the horizon, if you haven't already, it's time to start making your travel plans. Whether you are taking the family on a road trip to the mountains or flying to an exotic destination, if you are one of the millions of Americans who suffer from back pain you may be dreading the trip. Traveling requires us to sit for extended periods in cramped cars or planes and almost always requires heavy lifting of luggage, so it can easily wreak havoc on the back. Thankfully there are steps you can take to keep your back pain at bay and allow you to focus on the good part - the fun!

Whether you are driving, riding or flying, it is important to move as much as possible. If you're traveling by car be sure to stop at one to two-hour intervals to stretch your back and legs. If you're traveling by plane be sure to stretch every hour or so and move about the cabin when appropriate. Regular stretching helps prevent muscle imbalances in your hips and spine which helps prevent pain. Regardless of what mode of transport you're using, anytime you get a chance to move around and stretch, take it! A simple stretch, like a standing back extension (instructions in column on right side of page)

can help alleviate or prevent travel pains.

Maintaining good posture while seated is another important step you can take to help avoid pain. Be sure you are sitting with your back against the seat and not hunching forward. Your knees should sit at a right angle with your feet firmly resting on the floor or a footrest. Make use of your car's lumbar support or use a lumbar support pillow to provide proper support to your lumbar lordosis (lower back curve). Doing so will help keep excessive pressure off your lower back, which will help prevent pain. If your car doesn't have a lumbar support feature or you don't have an actual lumbar support pillow, it's ok – any small pillow or rolled up sweater will work. You can use the same trick when traveling by plane. Because each seat will be different and each person's lumbar lordosis is different, one size does not fit all. Just give it a try and adjust it until the support feels right.

The right luggage and handling it properly can make all the difference in traveling and avoiding back pain. A set of good rolling luggage with handles is ideal for ease of use. No matter what type of suitcase

you have, don't overstuff it. It's better to have a couple of pieces that are manageable in size and weight versus one huge, overpacked piece. You will be able to lift them in and out of storage spaces with more ease if they aren't too large or too heavy. When you do have to lift your luggage take care not to twist while you're lifting. Lift in stages when possible and always lift with your legs. Avoid carrying a heavy shoulder bag that can put too much stress on one side of your back. Using a backpack with two straps instead will more evenly distribute the weight.

Bringing a neck pillow, wearing comfy shoes and packing over the counter pain relievers are a few other things you can do to better your chances for pain free travel. If you normally suffer from back pain during trips be ready for cold/hot therapy by keeping an ice pack in your cooler or bringing a ziplock bag you can fill with ice and heat wraps or portable hot packs that heat up after you open them

Hopefully these tips will help keep you pain free while you explore new places and create memories with your family. We hope you have a wonderful trip!

STRETCH IT OUT Standing Back Extensions

There are numerous stretches you can incorporate into your daily routine that are beneficial in alleviating and preventing back pain. Regular stretching packs a one-two punch because it not only loosens tight muscles for immediate relief, it also strengthens the back for less pain in the future.

The standing back extension is one stretch in particular that's great to do after extended periods of sitting. Do these each time you take a break from riding/driving in the car while on extended trips, on your breaks at work or anytime you've been sitting too long:

- Stand tall with your feet shoulder width apart
- Contract your core
- Place your hands in the small of your back, touching your back with your palms
- Bend backwards into your hands and stretch
- Hold stretch for approximately 10 to 15 seconds
- Return to starting position and repeat the stretch 3 to 5 times

Remember to keep your core contracted and always start with your chest lifted, standing tall through the torso before stretching backwards. Aim to stretch slightly farther with each repetition.

To get maximum benefits from stretching it is important to make it a part of your daily routine. Try doing your stretches first thing in the morning to encourage a daily habit and then throughout the day as necessary. If you'd like to learn about other stretches, we'd love to help you! As with any new exercise routine, always consult with your healthcare provider to find out if it is right for you.



Gardening with Back Pain

With spring upon us garden lovers everywhere are getting ready to put their green thumbs to use. For those gardeners who suffer from back pain, taking a few extra precautions can make all the difference in avoiding a flare-up.

WARM UP: Gardening requires a range of motions. Kneeling, bending, squatting, digging and lifting work a lot of different muscles and joints. Be sure to warm them all up with a brisk five-minute walk and some stretches. This will get your blood pumping and all those muscles warmed up and ready to work.

LIFT CAREFULLY: Use the proper techniques when lifting to avoid injury. Squat or kneel instead of bending at the waist, carry items close to your body and keep your movements slow and smooth.

TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS & SWITCH BETWEEN TASKS: Listen to your body and give it a break when it's ready for one. Stay hydrated and stretch as needed. To reduce the risk of repetitive-motion injuries, switch between tasks and adjust your posture regularly.

LET TOOLS EASE STRAIN: Use a wheelbarrow or garden cart if possible when transporting multiple or heavy items. A cushioned kneeler will alleviate stress on your knees and back. Elevated or raised beds can make gardening easier on your back.

Sport Spotlight: Baseball – Injury Prevention

America's favorite pastime may not be a contact sport, but it has its fair share of injuries from contact with a ball, bat or another player. As with most sports, baseball injuries include strains, sprains and fractures. The most common baseball injuries involve the shoulder or elbow of the throwing arm. These arm injuries are normally caused by overuse due to the repetitive nature of the sport.

As with any sport, proper preparation, training and recovery are all important in preventing injury. A pre-season physical exam is an important step to identify any potential medical problems and ensure the athlete is in good condition for play. For both practice and games, players should always take time to warm up/stretch before and cool down/stretch after. Use of position-specific safety equipment and proper fitting gear also go a long way in protecting the player. For example, a catcher should always use a catcher's mitt and wear a helmet, face mask, throat guard, chest protector, protective cup and shin guards. Batters should wear a batting helmet and be sure it's also worn while waiting their turn in the "on deck" circle. Players should be instructed on how to avoid getting hit by a ball and proper sliding technique. Established guidelines for pitching and throwing count limits should always be adhered to.

Overuse injuries are common, but they can be prevented. Don't allow your child to pitch on consecutive days or play year-round and be sure they take regular breaks. Emphasize control, accuracy and good mechanics during practice and games. Be responsive to complaints of pain or discomfort and seek out medical care when necessary.

Did You Know?

You are approximately 1cm taller when you wake in the morning than when you go to sleep at night. As we go about our day Earth's gravitational pull causes the discs in our vertebrae to spread and flatten. When we lie down at night our spines relax and are able to decompress. This allows fluid to diffuse back into our discs and increases our height. It's similar to the affect that zero gravity has on astronauts who come home from space a couple of inches taller because of the lack of gravitational forces on their spines.

Upcoming Events

- February 14th – Valentine's Day
- February 18th – Presidents' Day
- March 10th – Daylight Saving Time Begins
- March 17th – St. Patrick's Day
- March 20th – First Day of Spring
- April 21st – Easter
- April 22nd – Earth Day

Contact Us

We'd love to hear from you! If you have any topics you'd like to see covered in our newsletter or questions addressed in our Ask the Doctor features, please drop us a note in our suggestion box. You may also email us at info@SpineInstituteFL.com or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SpineInstituteFL.

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