

# Risk Control Bulletin

## Your Three Natural Curves

RISK CONTROL



### Understanding Your Back

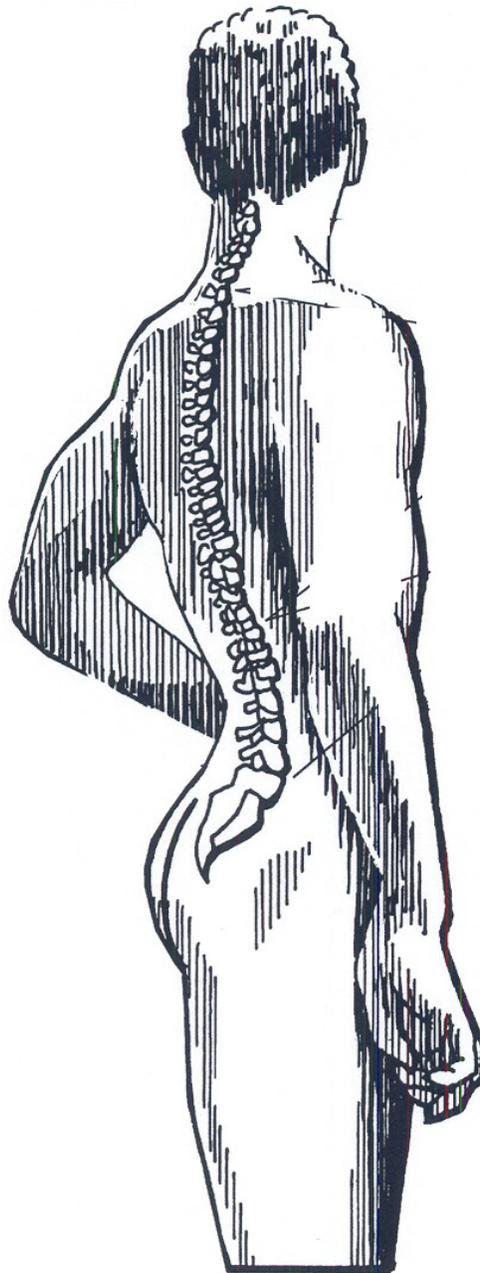
Your spine is truly a remarkable engineering feat – a column of small bones designed to be strong enough to support the weight of your head and body, yet flexible enough to allow you to walk, sit and dance. The secret to your spine's supple strength is in the balance of its curves.

### Know Your Curves

The small bones of your spine-called vertebrae-are designed to fit together in an S-shaped column. This column of curves is balanced so that the weight of your body is evenly distributed throughout your spine. If these curves get out of balance, the vertebrae are pushed out of line, stressing muscles and discs and causing pain. Starting from the top, these curves are:

**The Cervical Curve**, made up of seven small flexible vertebrae in your neck that support your skull, has a slight forward tilt.

**The Thoracic Curve**, the mainstay of the chest cavity, is made of larger, more rigid vertebrae. Twenty-four ribs extend from these long, slender bones. The thoracic curve has a more prominent backward curvature.



**The Lumbar Curve**, often called the workhorse of the spine, is made of five massive, somewhat flexible vertebrae that carry most of the weight of your body. The lumbar curve has a forward tilt.

### Keep Your Curves

When you keep these curves in balance, you reduce the risk of stress on your vertebrae-stress that can lead to pain and back injury.

- A straight back keeps your curves in balance. Imagine a straight line running from your ear, past your shoulder to your hip.
- A hunched back can stress the lumbar region and put pressure on the discs.
- A swayback-too much curve-can stress the muscles and ligaments of the lumbar region.

The two most important things you can do to keep your back in balance are to develop good posture and to do regular exercises to strengthen the muscles that support your spine.