

The Sublime Thoracic Spine

Anatomy of the Thoracic Spine

As with most parts of our incredibly designed anatomy, we don't notice our thoracic spine (or mid-back) unless it is bothering us. The thoracic spine humbly connects our cervical spine (neck) to our lumbar spine (low back). It consists of 12 vertebrae with 12 discs. The anatomy of the thoracic vertebrae change from resembling the cervical vertebrae to resembling the lumbar vertebrae in the lower segments. The thoracic vertebrae connect to the rib cage. Unless you are an anatomy nerd, this may not be of much interest to you. But what may be of interest to you is what happens when things are not functioning normally and you are feeling pain.

Problems in the Thoracic Spine

When we think of pain in the mid-back, we probably think of the middle part of the spine, and the areas adjacent to it. What we often do not consider, is that pain in the chest and abdomen, and at times even in the arms and hands or legs can be generated from problems in the thoracic spine. The lower thoracic spine can cause anterior (front of) hip pain and groin region pain. Symptoms of a thoracic problem can include pain, numbness and tingling, and restricted range of motion. We even have patients who describe increased pain with/difficulty with breathing due to thoracic spine issues. As always with chest pain or radiating arm symptoms, it is important not to ignore potential cardiac causes of pain. Once this is ruled out by your M.D., however, we can investigate other causes.

How Is It Injured?

Thoracic pain can be incredibly sharp and debilitating. It can afflict individuals who find themselves in poor postures, whether due to working conditions or sustained postures. Nursing mothers and those with small children who find themselves doing a lot of bending forward throughout the day are at risk. Traumas such as car accidents can produce pain in the thoracic spine.

What Can I Do About It?

Thoracic pain is common, but what does one do about it? We are trained to assess and treat the thoracic spine just as we treat the cervical and lumbar spines. We listen to your history to determine if there are any clues to aggravating and relieving factors, and we test range of motion and strength as necessary to establish baselines. Then we take you through specific movements to assess if your back responds to certain movements better than others. More often than not, we send you home from your first visit with exercises to do at home. In follow-up visits, we continue to assess your response to exercise, modifying as necessary. Our ultimate goal is to provide you with tools that you can use to eliminate your pain with this episode, and to address future episodes without having to rely heavily on medication or excessive medical care.

Congrats!

Congratulations to Gina Sims! Out of a pool of individuals who have referred friends or family to us she has been selected to receive a \$50 gift card to the restaurant of her choice!