



# SAFETY & HEALTH

## SURGERY NOT MANDATORY FOR BACK PAIN

### Study finds alternatives effective

For workers who injure their lower backs on the job, surgery may not be inevitable. A new study has found physical therapy and painkillers to be nearly as effective.

The large trial involved 13 spine clinics in 11 states and used 2,000 patients with ruptured disks in their lower backs. Half had surgery to repair damage, while half waited. Those asked to wait typically received physical therapy, counseling and anti-inflammatory drugs.

The surgery group reported immediate relief, but by three to six months, both groups reported improvement. After two years,



70 percent of all patients reported marked improvement. No one who waited had serious consequences and no one who had surgery had disastrous results.

The prevailing sentiment among doctors has been that waiting would cause great harm.

The study was funded by NIOSH, OSHA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It was published in the Nov. 22 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Source: *Safety Currents Express*

## USING CELL PHONE WON'T CAUSE CANCER

### Study finds long-term users not at risk

Maybe the oft-repeated "cell phones cause brain cancer" argument can finally be laid to rest. A new Danish study has found no evidence that cell phone users are at greater risk of cancer, not even among those who have used cell phones as long as 21 years.

The study involved more than 420,000 Danes who received their first cell phone between 1982 and 1995. Most had cell phone service for 8.5 years. Researchers then tracked cancers among the cell phone users from the start in 1982-1995 through 2002. They found the group's rate of cancer was actually slightly lower than Denmark's expected cancer rate for the general population.

Researchers did not know why the cancer rate registered lower, but surmised that cell phone users might lead healthier lifestyles.

Source: *Safety Currents Express*



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