Many of us that grew up in the ’70s and ’80s heard those phrases at every sports practice or physical training session we attended. I grew up thinking that pain was a normal part of life and lived by the motto, “Suck it up, buttercup!”

Now, I’m not saying I was the stoic, non-complaining person because I complained about the pain—a lot! Ask my husband!

Even though I complained and hurt, I continued to do things that I knew I’d pay for later in life. I was the superhero tech, who lifted the 100-pound dog from the floor to the table, and back again. I hunched over the makeshift dental table for years. I prided myself on being the bale throwing champion in our county for over six years, beating women 20 years younger than I. Yup, pretty stupid, huh!?

All of this caught up to me a couple of years ago when the pain in my lower back became so bad that I sought professional help. Long story, short, an MRI showed five things were going wrong in my lower back and needed surgery to repair the problems. In November 2018, I had a spinal fusion of L3-5, and let me tell you, it’s not a procedure for the faint of heart! I’m still working my way back to be the person I was before, but I know I’m on the road to recovery.

Listen to your body!
Pain is not normal, and we all need to take better care of ourselves. Learn about ergonomics and little things you can do in your practice daily to ensure your longevity in this profession we all love so much!

What can your practice do to help you?
Consider and follow through on the following suggestions:
• Have a physical therapist evaluate your work environment. Receive ideas on how to make things more ergonomic in all areas of the practice. Determine how to properly lift, and even how to stand and sit properly. Like we get to sit, right!?
• Use saddle chairs and magnifying loupes during dental procedures.
• Offer chair massages to employees on a weekly or monthly basis. If you have a massage training program near, you the students are always looking for people to practice on!
• Take a clinic yoga break and stretch for 10 minutes.
• Have a walking clinic meeting.
• Give gym memberships as an employee benefit.
• Challenge each other to be better physically.
• Have a code word, and when said, everyone strikes a power pose!

Take care of your body. You only get one, so make it last!!

Mary Berg, RVT, VTS (Dentistry) , Past NAVTA President
WellBeing Task Force Member, District Representative Committee Chair

“Pain is weakness leaving the body!”  “No Pain. No Gain!”