

Home remedy

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [February 17, 1999](#) issue

My involvement with the Park Ridge Center for Health, Faith and Ethics has given me opportunity to write on the topic of spiritual healing. But there are times when corporal healing is in order. I am reminded of an old professor who, looking into his denomination's pension plan, was told that the main benefits of the plan were "spiritual." He opted instead for a plan whose benefits were material.

Shakespeare observes that even the philosopher gets a toothache. It can distract from philosophy. I myself can be driven from concentration by a backache. Doctors tell me that I suffer nothing but the normal spinal deterioration of someone my age (a diagnosis that always struck me as inelegant).

About 104.7 percent of American's suffer from backaches. My physical therapist once commented, "Everyone has backaches and likes to talk about them, and everyone will give you her recipe for dealing with them. Take all but extreme advice; one out of a hundred suggestions might help. Otherwise, tough it out. And don't shovel snow." I like that last admonition.

So here's my coping strategy. It's used by a growing fellowship that Jim Nielsen of the Common Ministry at Washington State University dubbed "The Order of the Cutting Board Sitters." I met him when sciatic nerve pain made him captive to a deep easy chair. And, lo! I prescribed that when sitting, he first place a cutting board on the seat. He tried it. "It has made an amazing difference in reducing my discomfort level. I'm passing on this simple remedy to my orthopedic and physical therapist to suggest to their patients." He will probably patent the idea, or his therapists will prescribe it and make millions. But I'm giving it to you for free.

Simply carry with you a couple of 9-inch-by-12-inch plastic cutting boards. I recommend those with handles, for convenience. (You could also discreetly carry them in a small briefcase.) Set one against the back of a chair and one on the seat. Sit. Try it a few times. You'll never want to go back to "the best seat in the house"--the softest, which is the worst seat for the back. You'll be ready to join the Order of the Cutting Board Sitters.

The boards serve other functions, too. Put them on your airplane seat and you will be greeted with quizzical glances. People will want to keep their distance from a nut who carries and sits on cutting boards, and you will be free to read or study without interruption. You will also help the kitchenwares industry.

This therapy is also less wasteful. Unhelpful pills get tossed, and undesirable exercise instruments get buried in the attic. But cutting boards can always be used for cutting.

If it does not work? (I'll never make it as a New Age alternative spiritual therapist, because that kind of healer never admits to the possibility of failure.) I've found that 47.3 percent of cutting-board tryers said it did not help them. We exclude them from the order! And if they say the pain persists, we who practice medicine without a license do what expensive doctors do. We say: Take two aspirins and get a lot of rest. And take all but extreme suggestions. One out of a hundred might help.