

Low Back Pain Exercises

Exercises that stretch and strengthen the muscles of your abdomen and spine can help prevent back problems. If your back and abdominal muscles are strong, you can maintain good posture and keep your spine in its correct position.

If your muscles are tight, take a warm shower or bath before doing the exercises. Exercise on a rug or mat. Wear loose clothing. Do not wear shoes. Stop doing any exercise that causes pain until you have talked with your provider.

These exercises are intended only as suggestions. Ask your provider or physical therapist to help you develop an exercise program. Check with your provider before starting the exercises. Ask your provider how many times a week you need to do the exercises.

Caution: If you have a herniated disk or other disk problem, check with your healthcare provider before doing these exercises.

Exercises

- **Standing hamstring stretch:** Place the heel of your leg on a stool about 15 inches high. Keep your knee straight. Lean forward, bending at the hips until you feel a mild stretch in the back of your thigh. Make sure you do not roll your shoulders and bend at the waist when doing this or you will stretch your lower back instead. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times for each leg.

Repeat the same stretch on your other leg.

- **Cat and camel:** Get down on your hands and knees. Let your stomach sag, allowing your back to curve downward. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Then arch your back and hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Quadruped arm/leg raise:** Get down on your hands and knees. Tighten your abdominal muscles to stiffen your spine. While keeping your abdominals tight, raise one arm and the opposite leg away from you. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Lower your arm and leg slowly and alternate sides. Do this 10 times on each side.
- **Pelvic tilt:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Tighten your abdominal muscles and push your lower back into the floor. Hold this position for 5 seconds, then relax. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Partial curl:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Tighten your stomach muscles and flatten your back against the floor. Tuck your chin to your chest. With your hands stretched out in front of you, curl your upper body forward until your shoulders clear the floor. Hold this position for 3 seconds. Don't hold your breath. It helps to breathe out as you lift your shoulders up. Relax. Repeat 10 times. Build to 3 sets of 10. To challenge yourself, clasp your hands behind your head and keep your elbows out to the side.
- **Gluteal stretch:** Lying on your back with both knees bent, rest the ankle of one leg over the knee of your other leg. Grasp the thigh of the bottom leg and pull that knee toward your chest. You will feel a stretch along the buttocks and

possibly along the outside of your hip on the top leg. Hold this for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

- **Extension exercise:** Lie face down on the floor for 5 minutes. If this hurts too much, lie face down with a pillow under your stomach. This should relieve your leg or back pain. When you can lie on your stomach for 5 minutes without a pillow, then you can continue with the rest of this exercise.

After lying on your stomach for 5 minutes, prop yourself up on your elbows for another 5 minutes. Lie flat again for 1 minute, then press down on your hands and extend your elbows while keeping your hips flat on the floor. Hold for 1 second and lower yourself to the floor. Repeat 10 times. Do 4 sets. Rest for 2 minutes between sets. You should have no pain in your legs when you do this, but it is normal to feel pain in your lower back. Do this several times a day.

Exercises to avoid

It is best to avoid the following exercises because they strain the lower back:

- legs raised straight and together
- sit-ups with legs straight
- hip twists
- toe touches
- any backward arching.

Sports and other activities

In addition to conditioning your back, you need to condition your whole body. Physical activities such as walking or swimming can help strengthen your back. It is always best to check with your provider before you start any rigorous exercise program. Remember to begin slowly. Some sports can be harmful to your back.

Good activities for people with back problems include:

- walking
- bicycling
- swimming
- cross-country skiing.

Sports that may be dangerous to your back because of rough contact, twisting, sudden impact, or direct stress on your back include:

- football
- soccer
- volleyball
- handball
- weight lifting
- trampoline
- tobogganing
- sledding

- snowmobiling
- ice hockey.

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