Exercises for Relief From Low Back Pain

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Stretches for Back Pain

The American Chiropractic Association reports that 31 million Americans experience low-back pain. One study, reported in the *Annals of Rheumatic Disease*, finds that 1 in 10 people worldwide are affected by low back pain.

Americans spend at least $50 billion every year to treat back pain. Low back pain is also leading cause of disability in the world.

Back pain one of the most common reasons people miss work and also one of the most common reasons for visiting the doctor.

What Is Back Pain?

Your back is comprised of bones, joints, ligaments, and muscles. If you sprain a ligament, strain a muscle, rupture a disk, or irritate a joint, you may experience back pain.

Injuries and accidents can result in back pain and sometimes, a simple activity such as picking up a small child can cause back pain. Arthritis, repetitive activity, being overweight, poor posture, and stress also cause and worsen back pain.

You can also experience back pain as result of diseases affecting the organs, such as kidney infections or stones or a blood clot.

Treating Back Pain

Back health has a significant effect on quality of life so it is important to seek out appropriate treatment to manage your back pain. And while medication may help, its use has mixed results.

One study conducted for the non-profit public education and advocacy group, Research America, finds 58 percent of people experience relief with prescription drugs and another 41 percent found relief with over-the counter medications. And while some medications do offer pain relief, they can also cause side effects; long-term use is associated with variety of complications, including increased risk for stroke and heart attack, stomach bleeding, hypersensitivity to pain, and addiction.

A natural treatment for managing back pain and supporting your lower spine, without side effects and complications, involves stretching the muscles in your back. Many very simple exercises can be done in about 20 minutes as part of a daily routine.

Getting Ready and Warming Up

Everyone can benefit from stretching the soft tissues, muscles, ligaments, and tendons. It may take you a few weeks of stretching exercises to get relief for your back, spine and soft tissues, but you find many of these exercises to be beneficial for offering sustained back pain relief and increased range of motion.

There are some things to keep in mind as you start an exercise and stretching routine to help you manage back pain:

- Wear comfortable clothing that allows for easy movement.
- Make sure your stretching routine is pain free. Don't force your body to do what it cannot.
- Move into stretches slowly to avoid muscle tears.
- Make sure you are stretching on a flat surface where you can move freely.
- Hold your stretches for at least 25 seconds to allow muscles and joints time to loosen up.
- Perform each stretch 5 to 10 times.
- It is also wise to check with your doctor or physical therapist on any additional precautions you should take to avoid injury.

Stretches and Exercises

Neck and Shoulders

Chances are if you have a stiff back, you also have a stiff neck. Here are two exercises for stretching the neck and shoulder areas. These are practically helpful to people who work jobs require sitting for long periods at a computer.

Chin to Chest Stretch: Also called a flexion stretch, this exercise is pretty basic and involves getting into a seated position. Once seated, place both your hands at the rear of your head, with your fingers interlocked, thumbs pointed downward, and elbows straight out.

Slowly pull your head down to your chest and hold for at least 25 seconds. Repeat 5 times, and gradually move up to 10 times after several days.

Try a few neck extensions by lowering your head back as far as you can slowly and back about 5 times.

Ear to Shoulder Stretch: This exercise helps you to stretch the neck below the ears as well as the top of your shoulders.

To begin, gently lower your left ear towards you right shoulder until the stretch is felt inside the neck and be gentle on the return. Try this about 5 times for each side of your neck.

Hips and Gluteus Muscles

Your hips and buttocks (where you gluteus muscles are located) support your lower back. Here are 4 ways to stretch these muscles to help maintain your spine's stability and ease back pain:

Hip Stretch: While standing up straight with your feet apart, take half a step back with the right foot, bend the left knee, and shift your weight back to the right hip. While keeping your right foot straight, bend forward more, and reach down until a stretch in the outer hip is felt.

Hold the stretch for at least 5 seconds. Perform the stretch at least 5 times and repeat with your left foot.

Gluteus Maximus Muscle Stretch: To do this stretch, start by lying on your stomach with your hips and legs up with the assistance of an end of a table or bench. Tighten the buttock on one side and extend the leg on that side toward the ceiling while maintaining a natural spine position.

Movement should be slow and initially you may want to perform only a handful of repetitions and gradually move

up to 10 stretches per side, at least 4 times per week. Hold each stretch for 5 seconds.

Gluteus Medius Muscle Stretch. To strengthen this muscle, lie on one side with your back against the wall. Draw your belly button in while maintaining a natural spine position.

Raise your upper leg with your toes slightly pointed towards the ceiling and your heel keeping contact with the wall. Perform slowly with a 3 to 5 second hold.

You will want to perform this exercise at least 4 times per week and perform 10 repetitions per side.

Piriformis Muscle Stretch. The piriformis muscle runs through your buttock and can be a source of back and leg pain.

The easiest way to stretch this muscle to lie down on your back on a flat, comfortable surface, and cross one leg over the other. Gently, pull the other knee toward the chest until you feel the stretch in your buttock area.

Next page: continue reading to learn more about helpful back exercises.

Stretches and Exercises

Back Exercises

If you experience back pain and stiffness in the morning, these 3 back exercises can help to increase your mobility and decrease pain and discomfort:

Upper Back Stretch. Try an upper back stretch for a great stretch that works both the neck and upper back muscles. Start by sitting with good posture in a chair.

Stretch out both your arms in front of you and rotate your hands under your palms are face away from each other. Then bend over at the upper back as if you are diving off a diving board.

You should also flex your head chin-to-chest while bending at the upper back.

Back Flexion Exercise. Find a supportive surface to lie down on that is padded enough to offer some comfort. While laying down, bend both your knees up and put your feet flat to the ground.

Slowly bring up both knees to your chest and hold your knees with your hands. Gently pull your knees close to your chest and hold the position for 3 seconds.

Slowly allow your knees to come back down to the starting position with your feet flat on the floor and your knees bent. Do 5 to 10 repetitions.

You should not perform this exercise if you have a serious disc herniation, a vertebral compression fracture, or back pain caused by a serious medical condition, i.e. a spinal tumor.

If, after performing a back flexion exercise, your symptoms worsen, then you should stop and bring this issue up with your doctor. You should also stop the exercise if you start to have pain in your butt, thigh, or leg.

Knees-to-Chest Stretch: This knees-to-chest stretch is very easy to do. It offers a feel good back stretch you can do after sitting at a computer for an extended period or working in your garden and doing a lot of bending.

While lying on your back, pull both your knees to your chest and pull yourself into a ball-like position. You should feel a comfortable stretch once you are in the balled-up position.

The knees-to-chest stretch is one you can do daily and faithfully to help increase your range of motion. Having increased range of motion is helpful to everyone and especially if you have arthritis in your back.

Arching Back Stretch: This is a relatively easy stretch that starts with your standing straight with your feet shoulder length apart. Next, put the palms of your hands on your lower back and take a few slow deep breaths.

Bend your upper body backwards. Make sure to keep your knees straight and support your back with your hands.

Hold the stretch for 5 seconds and slowly return to your standing position. Repeat the stretch at least 5 times per day, 4 to 5 times per week.

On All Fours Stretch: Begin this back flexion and extension stretch by getting on your hands and knees on the floor. Your hands should be directly under your shoulders with your arms straight.

Now rock forward pulling your weight into your arms. Round your shoulders and let your seat down a little and hold this position for 5 seconds.

Now rock backward, sitting your buttocks as close to your heels as possible. Keep your arms straight and hold the pose for 5 seconds.

Return slowly to the start position and repeat 5 times.

Pain Medication Simply Doesn’t Work

Research has found that over-the-counter pain medications are rarely effective for treating back pain. In fact, a new report, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, finds that acetaminophen doesn’t reduce inflammation or pain and doctors are no longer recommending it for back pain.

Doctor now advise patients to concentrate on back strengthening exercises and only consider prescription medication as a last resort.

It is always wise to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program, especially if you are not used to exercising regularly. Your doctor may have some options and advice you may not be aware of.