4 Ways to Relieve Lower Back Pain Without Medication

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How to Relieve Lower Back Pain

There are different types of back pain treatment, from at-home remedies to medication, surgery options and more. Exercise, massage, yoga and even meditation are some of the safest ways to relieve lower back pain and are also the most effective, according to the latest research. Sadly, these non-traditional methods are yet to be covered by insurance companies.

However, don't fret, because with the right guidance you can perform a do-it-yourself version of each method –all in the comfort of your own home.

For the benefit of those who are either too weak or too busy to get the alternative therapies, we've chosen four methods on how to relieve lower back pain that you can easily perform at home without tools or expensive equipment.

1. Exercise

Never use lower back pain as an excuse to stop getting fit. Research shows that keeping yourself active despite the pain helps you recover faster than lying in bed all day. However, it doesn't mean you're invincible. To protect your back from further injuries, avoid tasks or exercises that involve a lot of lifting, twisting, bending, and any high-impact activity that can derail your recovery.

In a study exploring the impact of physical activity on non-specific chronic low back pain, it is revealed that aerobic exercises, as well as strength and flexibility training, are best for your recovery.

While aerobic exercises improve the flow of blood and nutrients to the affected areas of the back, the following exercises are responsible for increasing the core muscle strength and flexibility necessary for healing. You can choose from low-impact exercises like swimming, walking or cycling as long as you take necessary precautions to avoid worsening the back pain.

Alternatively, you can get the services of known "back whisperers"– certified professionals like physical therapists who can tailor your exercise program based on your current gait, posture, and strength. One of these gifted few is Dr. Stuart McGill, a spine biomechanics professor who formulated the three-step exercise that targets the lower back muscles.

2. Yoga

Think of yoga as a more mindful form of exercise. It may involve poses with fancy names, but it's still physical activity nonetheless and an excellent way to relieve back pain, too.

The good thing about yoga poses is there are variations available for everyone. Chair yoga, for example, is an

excellent way for office workers to stretch and de-stress after hours of sitting in front of the computer. Research about yoga is not as extensive, but all the findings suggest it provides some form of relief from back pain.

In a 2017 Cochrane systematic review, researchers scoured various medical databases to gauge the effects of yoga (with focus on Viniyoga, Hatha, and Iyengar forms of yoga) on adults aged at least 18 years old. The result shows that yoga may moderately improve pain and function at three and six months. Not the most impressive finding we're hoping to see, but it proves yoga is relatively more effective in managing back pain compared to other methods like tai chi and Pilates.

3. Meditation

Among the non-drug methods recommended by the American College of Physicians in treating low back pain is the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). Also known as meditation, this technique uses a holistic approach to managing the pain, focusing not only on the physical pain but also on the emotions and social factors that might be fueling the sensation.

Mindfulness meditation allows you to be in the present and recognize the pain without letting it control you. By focusing on your breathing or something relaxing, you'll learn how to be aware of your body and become more empowered to overcome the pain.

Guided meditation can be done while sitting, lying down, or walking is a good start for those who want to explore this method at home.

Those who are anxious, stressed out or depressed will especially benefit from it as meditation operates based on the biopsychosocial model which believes that the interplay of different factors – including the mind – is what triggers back pain.

A study published in the International Journal of Yoga reveals eight sessions of meditation are enough for you to experience reduced pain.

4. Massage

Scientific studies about the effectiveness of massage in curbing low back pain are inconclusive. The Cochrane systematic review, for instance, drew a conclusion from 25 randomized trials and found that massage brings improvement in pain and function on sub-acute (7-12 weeks) and chronic low back pain, but only for the short-term.

As with other methods that don't involve drugs or surgeries, there's no harm in including massage as part of your self-care program. The manipulation of muscle and soft tissues improves blood flow and relieves muscle spasms, both of which can have a positive effect on your low back pain.

Traditional massage requires the skill and expertise of a licensed therapist who should ideally be adept at different techniques–from Swedish and Thai to Shiatsu and sports massage.

However, massage can be a passive method of relaxation through the use of technologies like massage chairs–designed to deliver almost the exact type and quality of massage at a click of a button.

What Causes Lower Back Pain?

About 85% of patients experience what is known as "non-specific low back pain," which means there's no existing medical condition or spinal abnormality that may have caused the pain.

Although the source may be unknown, there are predisposing factors that make you more likely to experience lower back pain. These include:

- Obesity.
- Poor posture.
- Prolonged sitting or standing at work.
- Wong body mechanics when lifting heavy objects.

Back pain may also be triggered by anxiety, depression, boredom, and job dissatisfaction. For this reason, low back pain requires a multidisciplinary approach to address the biopsychosocial nature of the disorder adequately.

Non-specific low back pain can either be acute, which naturally subsides after a few weeks, or chronic, a persistent type that most doctors have been struggling to deal with. It’s only in rare instances when low back pain is caused by serious medical conditions, in which case surgeries and medications are more likely the preferred treatment methods.

Back pain cases that need immediate medical attention are those caused by fractures, infection, and tumor. Herniated disc causes lower back pain accompanied by numbness, pain, and weakness of the legs.

Another potentially debilitating cause of lower back pain is cauda equina syndrome, a condition characterized by weak bowel or bladder function.