7 Exercises for Low Back Pain You Can Do At Home

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Exercises for Lower Back Pain

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke estimates that upwards of 80% of adults will suffer from low back pain at some point in their lives. In fact, about 25% of adults have had low back pain in the last three months. This is why exercises for lower back pain are important.

What's more, low back pain is the leading cause of job-related disability, as well as one of the most common reasons to miss days of work. The American Chiropractic Association states that back pain in general accounts for 264 million – yes, millions of dollars – and many lost days of work annually.

What is causing all of our lower back pain? One would think that with all of the suffering and the missing work, there must be a major illness occurring! However, most causes of lower back pain are mechanical or non-organic, meaning that they occur from something such as an injury or a certain condition, such as arthritis.

Myself, I am new to the low back pain ball game. I've watched my husband suffer from low back pain for years. He has seen several specialists and now does many things to stave off the pain – from exercising to practicing proper structure (sitting upright and not slouching) are just some of the simple things he does every day to prevent and manage low back pain.

As for me, I am still learning ways to cope with my low back pain. Here are several exercises for lower back pain that I have learned from my research that may help give you lower back pain relief.

1. Crunches

Although we often do crunches to strengthen our abdominal muscles, they are also helpful in reducing lower back pain! Why? While they strengthen the abdominal muscles, they also strengthen the muscles of the lower back, and while we are strengthening, we are also reducing pain.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

It may seem basic, but let's review the basic steps of a crunch:

1. Lie on your back on the floor or a mat, with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
2. While engaging the abdominal muscles, cross your arms over your chest or place your hands behind your head and lift your chest off the floor. Ensure that you are using your abdominal muscles to lift your chest – not your arms and head!
3. Hold the crunch for a breath or two, then lower the back down to the floor. Repeat the crunch eight to 12 times.
4. This exercise should not put a strain on your lower back – if your lower back is hurting, check your form!

What about sit-ups? Are they better for you? Actually, no, not if you have got issues with your back! Doing a full sit-up will place unneeded pressure on the discs in your back and will only cause more lower back pain.

2. Wall Sits

Another exercise that strengthens both the back and the core – wall sits! For this exercise, all you will need is a wall.

Here's how to perform a wall sit:

1. Stand about a foot away from a wall, with your back to it.
2. Place your back against the wall, then slide down, against the wall, as if you are sitting into a chair. Ensure that while you are sliding your back down, your back is still firmly pressed against the wall.
3. Hold the wall sit for 10 seconds. Repeat eight to 10 times.

3. Back Extensions

A back extension is a gentle exercise that will strengthen the lower back while also providing a stretch.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

Here's how to perform a back extension:

1. On your mat, lie on your stomach.
2. Place your hands directly under your shoulders; place your weight into your hands and push your chest and shoulders off of the mat.
3. Hold this position for several seconds. Repeat if you would like.

4. Bird Dog

If you have ever taken a yoga class, bird dog will look familiar to you. The Sanskrit name is *parsva balasana.* This posture is known to strengthen the core as well as strengthen the lower back. It also challenges the ability to balance.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

Here's how to perform bird dog:

1. Come to your hands and knees on your mat (tabletop).
2. Extend your right leg back, keeping it straight. Keep the leg parallel to the floor and flex the foot.
3. Extend your left arm forward, keeping it straight. Keep the arm parallel to the floor.
4. Hold for 5 to 10 breaths before returning the leg and hand to the ground, while lifting the opposite leg and hand off the ground and extending.

5. Pelvic Lift With Bridge Pose

Performing pelvic lifts can help to strengthen the musculature in the lower back.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

Here's how to perform a pelvic lift:

1. Lie on your back on your mat. Bring your knees flat on the floor and engage your abdominal muscles. You should feel your back pressing into the mat.
2. While keeping the abdomen engaged, slowly lift the pelvis off the mat. Lower back onto the mat. Repeat eight to 10 times.

To make a pelvic tilt a bit more advanced, you can perform a *setu bandha sarvangasana*, or bridge pose. Here's how to do bridge pose:

1. Lie on your back on your mat. Bring your knees flat on the floor, about hip-width apart. The arms should be alongside the body, fingertips grazing the heels.
2. Ground the heels into the mat, then lift the hips off the mat. The knees should remain hip-width apart.
3. Roll the shoulders underneath the back and clasp the hands underneath the hips.
4. Engage the core while lifting the hips higher.
5. Hold the posture for four to eight breaths.

6. Cat/Cow Yoga Pose

Yet another yoga pose, cat/cow helps to relieve low back pain by providing dynamic movement of the low back muscles. It fuses two yoga poses – cat, *marjaryasana* and cow, *bitilisana*, although we most commonly do them together and know it as cat/cow.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

Here's how to do cat/cow:

1. Begin on your hands and knees on your mat (tabletop).
2. Arch your back towards the ceiling. Drop your gaze to your mat and your hips to your mat. This is the cat portion of the pose. Hold for five seconds, or a breath or two.
3. Relax your back, letting your abdominal muscles drop towards the mat. Bring your gaze and your hips towards the ceiling. This is the cow portion of the pose. Hold for five seconds, or a breath or two.
4. Cycle through cat/cow for thirty seconds or so – although it feels so good, you may want to keep going!

7. Child's Pose

For all the yogis out there, child's pose is familiar because it is the pose for active relaxation and rest. We use child's pose when we need to take a moment to breathe, to rest, or when a posture or sequence gets difficult. However, it can also be extremely functional for a low back practice.

This posture is a great way to end your exercise practice – it can allow you to take a moment to rest, but it also stretches the muscles of the lower back.

For this exercise, you will need a mat, a blanket, or a towel. You can choose to do to the exercise on the floor as well.

Here's how to perform child's pose:

1. Begin on your hands and knees on your mat (tabletop).
2. Reach forward with your hands, towards the front of your mat. Place your palms flat on the mat, then drop your hips towards your heels.
3. Your head will fall in between your arms, towards the mat
4. If your lower back hurts in this posture, widen the knees to allow for more room for your belly. You can also place a block under your belly for more support.
5. Allow yourself to rest in child's pose for at least 30 seconds, or as long as you would like.

The Bottom Line…

Treating our low back pain is a multimillion-dollar industry. However, if we can be proactive about it – like using the above exercises for lower back pain suggestions, practicing proper posture and being mindful of our bodies – we can save ourselves numerous amounts of dollars, missed time from work and even better, treat our own back pain in the process.