

Back

in Shape & Pain Free

Exercises to Safeguard Your Back

Stretching and an active lifestyle are often recommended to help reduce back pain and speed the recovery process following an injury. Improving flexibility through stretching is also an excellent way to avoid future injuries.

Depending upon one's individual injury and level of pain, the exercise and rehabilitation program may vary. The key is to start slowly and increase the repetitions as you feel stronger. Consult with your doctor of chiropractic prior to starting a new exercise program, especially when associated with low-back pain. He or she can help develop an individualized program and provide instruction on proper stretching technique.

Passive Stretches

Passive stretches help facilitate movement in the affected muscle or joint. Stretches should be held for 15 to 30 seconds, allowing the muscles to gradually relax and lengthen. **Stretches should never cause pain nor should you feel tingling in the extremities. Stop immediately if you experience any discomfort.**

Hamstring Stretch

Lie on your back with both legs straight. Bend one leg at the knee and extend one leg straight up in the air. Loop a towel over the arch of the lifted foot, and gently pull on the towel as you push against it with your foot; you should feel a stretch in the back of the thigh. Hold 30 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times per leg. This stretch may be performed several times per day.

Piriformis Stretch

The piriformis muscle runs through the buttock and can contribute to back and leg pain. To stretch this muscle, lie on the back and cross one leg over the other; gently pull the knee toward the chest until a stretch is felt in the buttock area. Hold 30 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times. This stretch may be performed several times per day.

Back Stretch

Lie on your stomach. Use your arms to push your upper body off the floor. Hold for 30 seconds. Let your back relax and sag. Repeat. This stretch may be performed several times per day.



Active Stretches

Active stretches facilitate movement and improve strength. **Stretches should never cause pain nor should you feel tingling in the extremities. Stop immediately if you experience any discomfort.**

Leg Raises

Lie on your stomach. Tighten the muscles in one leg and raise it 1 to 2 inches from the floor. Return the raised leg to the floor. Do the same with the other leg. Repeat 20 times with each leg. This exercise may be performed several times per day.



Bridges



Lie on your back with your knees flexed and your feet flat on the floor. Keep the knees together. Tighten the muscles of the lower abdomen and buttocks; slowly raise your hips up from the floor and then lower them back to the resting position. Repeat this exercise 20 times. This exercise may be performed several times per day.

The Pointer



Kneel on mat on hands and knees, with palms directly under shoulders and knees hip-width apart. Slowly raise your right arm, and extend it forward parallel to floor. (Balance by contracting your abdominal muscles.) Keep right palm parallel to the floor, then lift the left leg, and straighten it behind you. Hold opposing limbs off the ground for 30 to 60 seconds without arching your back. Switch sides. Repeat 3 to 6 times.

The Cardio Component

Most health care professionals recommend 20 to 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise three to four days per week to improve endurance and help lose weight. Until you've recovered from back pain, select low-impact activities that burn calories, but won't place undue stress on your joints. Also, before beginning a vigorous exercise program, check with your physician to rule out any possible cardiovascular health risks.

Type of Exercise	Avg. Calories Burned per 30 min.	Notes
Stationary Recumbent Bike	250	A safe form of cardio because you press your lower back against the seat rest at all times.
Walking	265	Walking is very gentle on the back. Avoid walking on concrete or uneven terrain.
Elliptical Trainer	300	Focus on standing upright and maintaining good posture. Don't lock your knees.
Water Therapy	270	Walking in a shallow pool can provide weightless conditioning, which minimizes stress on the back. However, for some patients swimming and water aerobics may cause too much rotation of the spine. Be sure to first consult with your health care provider.

Stretching Tips

To get the maximum benefit from stretching, proper technique is essential. The American Chiropractic Association offers the following tips:

- Warm up your muscles before stretching by walking or doing other gentle movements for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Slowly increase your stretch as you feel your muscles relax. Don't bounce.
- Stretch slowly and gently only to the point of mild tension, not to the point of pain.
- Don't hold your breath. Inhale deeply before each stretch and exhale during the stretch.
- As your flexibility increases, consider increasing the number of repetitions.
- Stop immediately if you feel any severe pain.