

Exercises for your lower back

Back exercises are extremely important because the muscles of the spine and abdomen support the spine better than any brace or corset. If you have chronic, nagging back pain, it is likely that performing these exercises religiously for 3 months will greatly reduce your back pain.

Exercises for the lumbar spine

The purpose of these exercises is to strengthen the various muscles that support the spine, especially the abdominal muscles and the extensor muscles of the spine.

Guidelines

- Do these exercises on a padded or well-carpeted floor.
- Do them at least twice a day for no less than 5 minutes at a time; once a day is better than not at all.
- Rest between each exercise.
- 2 or 3 of the 6 exercises is sufficient.

- Do not strain.
- The exercise may be uncomfortable at first, and initially each one should be repeated *only 2 or 3 times*.
- If there is any problematic pain with a particular exercise, stop doing it.

As the muscles stretch and strengthen, the routine becomes more natural and enjoyable.

Splinting the lumbar spine

It is a good idea to learn how to keep the lumbar spine in a fixed position by using the abdominal muscles and those around the spine.

- Lie face-up with one hand under your neck and your knees bent.
- Draw in your stomach firmly, and press your lumbar region against the floor by slightly raising your buttocks. Hold—count to 6—relax; repeat 10 times.

Note: Swimming is the ideal exercise for your back.

Exercise 1: Back arch

Stand up straight, feet pointing directly forwards and apart as wide as your shoulders, hands placed on the small of your back, fingers pointing backwards. Breathe in and breathe out slowly. As you breathe out, bend backwards as far as you can while supporting your back with your hands and keeping your knees straight. Hold your lower back arched for 5 seconds, then return to the neutral position. Repeat 5 times.

Exercise 2: Knee-to-chest raise

Lie flat on your back, bend one leg up, grasping it with your hand just below the knee, and bend your head forward so that your forehead approaches your knee. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

Exercise 3: Straight-leg raise

Lie on your back. With your leg perfectly straight, raise it as high as you can. Repeat with the other leg. Take this to the limit of pain.

Exercise 4: Straight-leg swing

Lie on your back with your arms spread out on either side. Raise one leg as high as possible, keeping it straight. Swing the leg in an arc from one side to the other. It is important to swing the leg on the side of your back that you feel pain (if you have any). Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

Exercise 5a and b: Pelvic roll and one-sided stretch

5a You can get better results if someone pins your shoulders to the floor while you do this exercise. Lie on your back. Lift your legs together in the

air and roll them from side to side. Hold for 5 seconds on each side. Repeat 5 times.

5b A better variation is to bend up the leg on your painful side and stretch it across your body while you turn your head to the opposite side. Use your hand to reinforce the stretch on your bent leg.

