

Partial Crunches

Some exercises can aggravate back pain and should be avoided when you have acute low back pain. Partial



crunches can help strengthen your back and stomach muscles. Lie with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Cross arms over your chest or put hands behind your neck. Tighten stomach muscles and raise your shoulders off the floor. Breathe out as you raise your shoulders. Don't lead with your elbows or use arms to pull your neck off the floor. Hold for a second, then slowly lower back down. Repeat 8 to 12 times. Proper form prevents excessive stress on your low back. Your feet, tailbone, and lower back should remain in contact with the mat at all times.

Seek Medical Assistance if you have...

- Persistent pain without improvement for one week
- Severe spasm or radiation of pain to legs or buttocks (sciatica)
- Pain that interferes with normal functioning
- Any numbness, tingling, weakness, or bowel or bladder alterations
- History of previous back weakness or spine problems
- Fever
- Frequent, painful, or bloody urination
- Leg pain traveling down below the knee
- Other symptoms that may indicate a more serious problem



Back Pain



“Back pain is the number two reason that Americans see their doctors, second only to colds and the flu! Nearly everyone will have at least one backache at some point during their life.”

Oh my aching back...

Back pain is fairly common for all of us. After lifting something heavy, twisting your body in the wrong direction or perhaps being at the computer for a long stretch of time, you may experience an aching back. Whatever you did, the pain is real and you need relief!

You may not recall what caused the pain but it is often due to some combination of disk, ligament, muscle injury, sometimes with nerve irritation.

Low back pain can usually be self treated. Back pain accompanied by other symptoms may indicate further medical attention is needed.

Self-Treatment for Low Back Strain or Sprain does not mean suffering quietly. You begin by stopping any activity that causes back pain. Your next steps of self-treatment are—Rest, apply ice to the area of your back with pain, and take over-the-counter analgesic medication..

REST

One or two days of bed rest is usually sufficient. Too much rest will cause your muscles to stiffen and weaken. A bed board of ¾-inch plywood placed under the mattress will help you lie in a comfortable position. Lying on your side, with your knees drawn up toward your chest, with a pillow placed between the knees, is the best position for your back. Another good position is resting on your back with a pillow behind your knees. Avoid laying on your stomach or flat on your back with your legs out straight.

ICE / HEAT

You may apply ice packs to areas of your back pain, for 20 minutes every two hours for the



first two days following your injury/pain. You may make your own ice packs. Place ice in *zip-locked type*-plastic bag, close bag, forcing extra air out of bag and place ice bag in another zip-

locked bag, with zip-lock side into bottom of the second bag. You may use a bag of frozen vegetables, such as corn or peas —any kind in small pieces that will conform to your back.

Back sprains and strains don't usually cause much swelling and moist heat may be more effective than ice. Taking a hot shower, tub bath, use a wet towel, heating pad or hot water bottle may reduce your discomfort. Limit heat application to 15-20 minutes every few hours as heat can actually make you feel drained and tired rather than relaxed.

When using warm packs /heating pads, *never lay on them*. Remember to set a heating pad on low and NEVER fall asleep while it is being used, as burns can occur.



Over-The-Counter MEDICATIONS

Acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen are OTC analgesic medications that can help reduce your pain and swelling. Other Non-Steroid Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID) may assist in reducing your pain. If you are currently taking prescription medications, **check with your physician before** taking any OTC medications. If you are able to take OTC analgesics, follow the package instructions.

EXERCISES

Gentle exercises that relieve and prevent stiffness by stretching and relaxing back muscles may be started, once your pain subsides. You may have some discomfort at first, but your back muscles need stretching. Avoiding exercise for too long may cause your back to stiffen and weaken,



predisposing you to more back problems in the future. If you experience sharp pain, however, check with your healthcare provider

PREGNANCY, OBESITY and HIGH-HEELS

All three of these tend to increase the forward curve of your lower back, causing more strain. During pregnancy, ligaments soften, adding even more potential for back strain and sprain. You may decrease the strain on your back, by wearing flat shoes or tennis shoes; leave high heels in the closet.

PREVENTION

Back problems are one of the most preventable injuries. Preventing low back pain can be done by avoiding strain whenever you are lying, sitting, standing, walking, working, and exercising. Keep your stomach and back strong and flexible through regular exercise.

POSTURE—Good posture means balancing the natural curves in your neck, middle-back, and lower back. When your back is balanced, it is self-supporting and required little help from your back muscles. Keep your lower back flattened, not swayed back or slouched forward.

LIFTING—Maintain your back's natural curve when lifting. Squat directly in front of the object to be lifted, rise, letting your legs and thighs do the work. Keep the object you are lifting, close to your body and do not twist. Get help when you can't easily lift object.

STANDING—Stress is put on your back when you stand for long periods of time. Shift your weight from one side to the other or try propping one foot up 6-8 inches high to reduce the stress.

SITTING — Sit in firm seats with straight backs. Keep your back flat and your knees higher than your hips. When sitting in chair too high that your feet don't rest flat on the floor, rest them on a footstool, or cross your legs so one of your knees is higher than your hips. Driving, sit close enough to the steering when so your lower back is flattened and perpendicular to the floor and your knees and hips are bent.

SLEEPING—Sleep on a firm, flat mattress. Sleep on your side is recommended, with your knees & hips bent, a pillow under your head or on your back with pillows beneath your head and knees. If you sleep on your stomach, place a pillow under your hips to reduce the curve in your lower back.

PACKS AND SORE BACKS —Students and others cause back problems by slinging a backpack full of books over one shoulder. This is a common cause of pain in the upper and lower back and shoulders. Try carrying the backpack over both shoulders or at least alternate your pack from one shoulder to the other.

IF YOU HAVE A TROUBLED BACK—Start a regular conditioning exercise program, 30 minutes every-other-day along with stretching before and after exercising.

Helpful activities are swimming, brisk walking & bicycling. Until symptom free and strength, flexibility and conditioning are restored, **avoid** tennis, golf and any activity that combines sudden bending and twisting.*

EXERCISES—While back pain can last up to 6 weeks or more, often it subsides within the first week. Exercises may be started then. The following exercises are designed to improve and strengthen your back muscles. If your back pain increases or continues after the first week, stop exercising and contact your health care provider.

* Adapted from *Oh My Aching Back*, American College Health Association,

BEGIN: Tension can cause your pain to increase. Try to relax. Start exercises slowly.

Knee to Chest

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.



Bring one knee to your chest, keeping the other foot flat on the floor. Keep your lower back pressed to the floor, and hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Then lower your knee and repeat with the other leg. Do this 2 to 4 times for each leg. You may use your arms to gently pull your legs to ward your chest.

Pelvic Tilts

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on floor. Tighten your stomach by pull-



ing in and imagining your belly button moving toward your spine. You'll feel your back pressing into the floor, and your hips and pelvis rocking back. Hold for 10 seconds while breathing in and out smoothly. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Hamstring Stretches

Lie on your back and bend one knee. Loop a towel under the ball of



your foot. Straighten your knee and slowly pull back on the towel. You should feel a gentle stretch down the back of your leg. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Do 2 - 4 times each leg.