

BACK PAIN

EXERCISE AND LOW BACK PAIN



Introduction

Although some people might find the idea of exercising to manage low back pain surprising, staying active and following a carefully considered exercise program can play an important role in recovery and prevention. Regular exercise can strengthen muscles, improve posture and have a positive effect on mood and stress levels, all of which lowers the risk of future back and joint problems. In fact, the longer an individual with back pain remains inactive, the harder it may be to regain mobility and begin recovery.¹

In this guide...

IntroductionPag 1
CardioPag 1
WeightsPag 2
SafetyPag 3
ResultsPag 4



Aerobic exercise

Also known as cardiovascular exercise or “cardio”, this type of activity increases both the heart rate and the amount of blood pumped out of the heart to the muscles and lungs. Cardiovascular exercise relies mainly on larger muscles in the legs, arms and hips.² Aerobic exercise releases hormones —called endorphins— which can have an immediate effect on mood.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise (brisk walking), five times a week. Other, more intense, activities include cycling, jogging, swimming and rowing.

Weight-bearing exercise

This type of exercise is commonly known as strength training. It is essential for strengthening both the muscles which protect the bones and joints and the bones themselves, therefore reducing the risk of injury. Good bone strength is especially important for women and the elderly, who are more prone to the bone disease known as osteoporosis.



Try to do at least 30 minutes of weight-bearing exercise, twice a week. Example activities include yoga, Pilates, walking, running, dancing, doing aerobics classes, weight training, or exercises which use an individual's own body weight as resistance (such as sit-ups or push-ups).

Start by introducing five minutes of strength training into your routine, twice a week. Gradually build up to thirty minutes twice a week. An organized class, such as Pilates, can provide added structure and motivation.

Core stabilization

These simple exercises strengthen the muscles in your trunk, improving posture, encouraging balance and decreasing the risk of injury. Talk to your doctor or a fitness expert for more information.



If you are using weights, start with lighter weights and pay attention to how your body responds: you should feel tired by the last two repetitions but still able to maintain good form and technique. Only add weight when the final repetitions feel too easy,³ and add the smallest possible weight increment.

How you breathe when doing strength or weight training exercises is also important. Exhalations should be made during the “resistance” part of the movement: when lifting, rising, pushing, or pulling. Inhalations should be made when releasing, returning to “start”

position, or lowering.³

Important: Beginners or individuals with existing low back pain or any other medical condition should always consult a doctor before starting any exercise program.

Advice for safe and effective exercise⁴.

- Always warm up and cool down before any exercise, no matter how light. Five to ten minutes is sufficient?
- It is normal to feel sore from 12 to 24 hours after beginning a new exercise, especially an intense activity. However, if pain begins immediately after activity, seek medical advice. Likewise, consult a doctor if pain persists after one or two weeks.
- Take extra care when fatigued or if you are feeling cold symptoms. Flu, sore throat, or diarrhea sufferers should wait until a complete recovery is made. If unsure, speak to your doctor.
- Use proper footwear and clothing. For low back pain sufferers, the right footwear is very important, and should be replaced every six months.
- Consider switching types of sport, exercise, or movement from time to time, especially if you suffer from repetitive strain injuries. Examples of changes could include switching strokes in swimming or alternating between tennis and cycling.
- Do not be afraid to take it slow. This applies both when you are feeling under the weather and when beginning any new exercise, even for regular exercisers in good shape?

Exercise and back pain

1. Individuals who experience back pain at any time during exercise should stop their activity immediately.
2. Individuals who are normally sedentary should begin exercising gradually, ensuring enough warm-up and cool-down time and adapting their program to their own physical capacity.
3. Individuals considering a new sport or exercise should also follow a gradual plan of initiation into their new activity, adapting to their level of physical fitness accordingly.

Proper technique is essential. If you suffer from low back pain, speak to a qualified fitness instructor or doctor about possible modifications to exercises or activities to protect your back and prevent injury.

Questions about your diagnosis?

Unsure which treatment is right for you?

Did you know you have access to a free, independent and confidential decision support service?

Discuss your concerns and have your case reviewed by a specialist in your condition.

The decision is yours. And we're with you all the way.



1. Exercises to manage back pain. Arthritis Research UK website. http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/back-pain/back-pain-exercises.aspx?qclid=EAjalQobChMlsNqgh8X-1QIVxbztCh3BgggLEAAYASAAEgKYHPD_BwE. Accessed August 30, 2017.

2. Aerobic exercise: Top 10 reasons to get physical. Mayo Clinic website. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/aerobic-exercise/art-20045541>. February 24, 2017. Accessed August 29, 2017.

3. 7 tips for a safe and successful strength-training program. Harvard Health Publications website. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/7-tips-for-a-safe-and-successful-strength-training-program>. Accessed August 30, 2017.

4. Ten tips for exercising safely. Harvard Health Publications website. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/10-tips-for-exercising-safely>. Accessed August 29, 2017.

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