

STRETCHING AND STRENGTHENING

Extension exercises

These stretch tissues along the front of the spine, strengthen the back muscles, and may decrease pain caused by a herniated disc. These are generally a good choice for people whose back pain is eased by standing and walking.



PRESS-UP BACK EXTENSION

Lie on your stomach with your hands under your shoulders. Push with your hands so your shoulders begin to lift off the floor. If it's comfortable, put your elbows on the floor directly under your shoulders so you can rest in this position for several seconds.

PRONE "SWIMMING" EXERCISE

Lie on your stomach on the floor with your arms straight out ahead of you. Raise your opposite arm and leg (for example, raise your right arm and left leg) a few inches off the floor and hold them there for 5 seconds. Lower them to the floor, and switch to the other arm and leg. Repeat 10 times.



Flexion exercises

These strengthen stomach and other muscles, and stretch the muscles and ligaments in the back. These are generally a good choice for people whose back pain is eased by sitting down.

KNEE-TO-CHEST EXERCISE



Lie on your back with knees bent and your feet close to your buttocks. Bring one knee at a time to your chest, keeping the other foot flat on the floor (or straight, whichever feels better). Keep your lower back pressed to the floor. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Relax and lower the knee to starting position. Repeat with other leg. To get more stretch, put your other leg flat on the floor while pulling knee to chest.

CURL-UPS

Lie on the floor on your back with knees bent at 90-degree angle. Feet should be flat on the floor, about 12" from your buttocks. Cross arms over chest. Slowly contract abdominal muscles and raise shoulder blades off floor. Keep your head in line with your body; don't press your chin to your chest. Hold this position for 2 seconds, then slowly lower yourself back down to the floor. Repeat 3 to 10 times.



Additional strengthening and stretching exercises.

PELVIC TILTS



Lie on your back with your knees bent. "Brace" your stomach—tighten your muscles. Pull your belly button in and up towards your ribs. You should feel like your back is pressing to the floor and your hips and pelvis are slightly lifting off of the floor. Hold for 10 seconds while breathing smoothly.

BRIDGING



Do not continue with this exercise if it causes pain. Lie on your back with both knees bent and ankles bent so only your heels are digging into the floor. Knees should be bent about 90 degrees. From here, push your heels into the floor, squeeze your buttocks, and lift your hips off the floor until shoulders, hips, and knees are all in a straight line. Hold briefly, and then slowly lower your hips back down to the floor. Do 20 repetitions, repeat 3 times.

HAMSTRING STRETCH

Lie on your back in a doorway, with one leg through the open door. Slide your leg up the wall. Straighten your leg and hold it there for 30 to 60 seconds. Do not arch your back. Do not bend either knee. Maintain heel contact with the wall and floor. Do not point your toes. Repeat with other leg. Do 3 to 10 times for each leg.



HIP FLEXOR STRETCH

Kneel on the floor with one knee bent and one leg behind you. Position your forward knee over your foot. Keep other knee touching the floor. Slowly push hips forward until you feel the stretch in the upper thigh of your rear leg. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat with opposite leg. Do 3 to 5 times on each side.



WALL SIT

Lean against a wall so your back is flat against it. Slowly slide down until your knees are slightly bent, pressing your lower back into the wall. Hold for a count of 10, then slide back up the wall. Repeat 10 times.



PECTORALIS STRETCH

Lean into wall allowing shoulder to be pushed back. Turn body away from positioned arm. Hold stretch. Repeat with opposite arm.



Aerobic exercise

Some examples are walking, swimming, running, etc. Non-weight-bearing exercise, such as swimming, tends to be a better choice if you have back pain. Walking in water up to your waist or chest is also good aerobic exercise. Take easy, short walks when you have low back pain. When recovering from pain, wait at least 1 or 2 weeks after symptoms of back pain start. Begin with 5 to 10 minutes a day. Gradually work up to 20 to 30 minutes of continuous activity per day.