

Exercise and back pain

Regular exercise is your best weapon against back problems. Many people will avoid exercising because of the discomfort experienced. However, exercising will strengthen the muscles and will also improve muscle tone and flexibility. During exercise your body also releases neurotransmitters called endorphins, which are natural painkillers of the body that may assist in reducing the pain.

Stretching is an important component for the relief of back pain. The key is to find what muscles or muscle groups are tight or imbalanced. This imbalance causes postural problems and strains which lead to back pain. Stretching also reduces your risk of injury by warming up the muscles as well as increasing long-term flexibility.

Strength training can make your arms, legs and lower body stronger. Strong stabilizing abdominal muscles can also relieve back strain. Back strengthening exercises may also help to prevent additional compression fractures in people suffering from osteoporosis.

Before starting any exercise programme you should consult your doctor or physiotherapist to determine what is suitable for you. In order to exercise correctly, follow the advice below:

- Start slowly, especially if you have not exercised for a long time. Do not over-exert yourself, know your limits and stop the exercise when it hurts. Increase your workout time gradually.
- Make appropriate choices with regards to the type of exercise you wish to do.
- Swimming and water exercises are good for lower back pain (especially in a warm pool) as they are non-weight bearing exercises.
- Aerobic exercise improves overall fitness and helps shed the excess weight that puts more stress on the back.

Try the following exercises to relieve pain and prevent injury:

Knees to chest exercise - Lying on your back, lift your right knee and pull it as close as you possibly can to your chest. Hold for 20 seconds and relax. Alternate legs and repeat 10 - 20 times. Pull both your knees to your chest and repeat once again.



Lower back exercise - Lie on your stomach with your arms extended above your head. Lift your right arm and your left leg off the ground at the same time. Hold for 10 seconds and do 20 - 30 repetitions. Switch arms/legs and repeat.

Upper back exercise - Lie on your stomach with your arms spread to the height of your shoulders. Lift both arms off the floor until your shoulder blades 'pinch' and place them slowly in the down position. Do 10 - 15 repetitions mimicking a bird flying. Lift your feet and knees off the floor and your lower back, hamstrings, and rear end will flex and strengthen.

Stabilising exercise - Lie on your back with your knees bent. Squeeze your buttocks and tilt your pelvis backwards, hold for 10 seconds and repeat 10 - 20 times. Now try and keep this position and lift your buttocks off the floor.

Press-ups - Press-ups are half of a push-up. It is a great exercise to strengthen your lower back. Lie on the floor on your stomach. Keep your

pelvis flat on the floor and push up with your hands, arching your back as you lift your shoulders off the floor.

Keep your back strong and healthy! Be aware of the risks you expose your back to every day. A regular exercise programme, good weight and good posture and appropriate lifting techniques will save you a lot of pain and suffering. Should you develop back pain seek help from your pharmacist for appropriate medication to relieve the pain as soon as possible.

References:

<http://www.military.com/>

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