

Back Exercises

for a Healthy Back



Your 15 - Minute Workout

Why Do Back Exercises?

You use your back all day, every day. That means your back is often at risk for injury. A 15- or 20-minute workout can help you keep your back strong, whether you have a back injury or are trying to prevent one.

Risks to Your Back

The human back is naturally prone to damage. But most causes of back pain can be controlled, including:

- Weakness or tightness in the muscles that support the back.
- Straining to lift heavy loads.
- Practicing poor body mechanics (ways of moving).
- Poor posture.
- Being overweight.

How Exercise Helps

Doing back exercises for a few minutes a day keeps the muscles that support the back stronger and more flexible. This makes back injury less likely. Exercise can help you work or play longer without back pain. And it can help you cope better with a back injury if you already have one.

Exercise Tips

To exercise safely:

- Check with your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program.
- Expect some soreness at first. If pain worsens, stop the exercise and check with your healthcare provider.
- Pace yourself. Start slow and work up to more vigorous exercise.
- Stretch slowly. Don't jerk or bounce.
- Breathe slowly and deeply. Don't hold your breath.



Using poor lifting technique or lifting loads that are too heavy can lead to back injury.



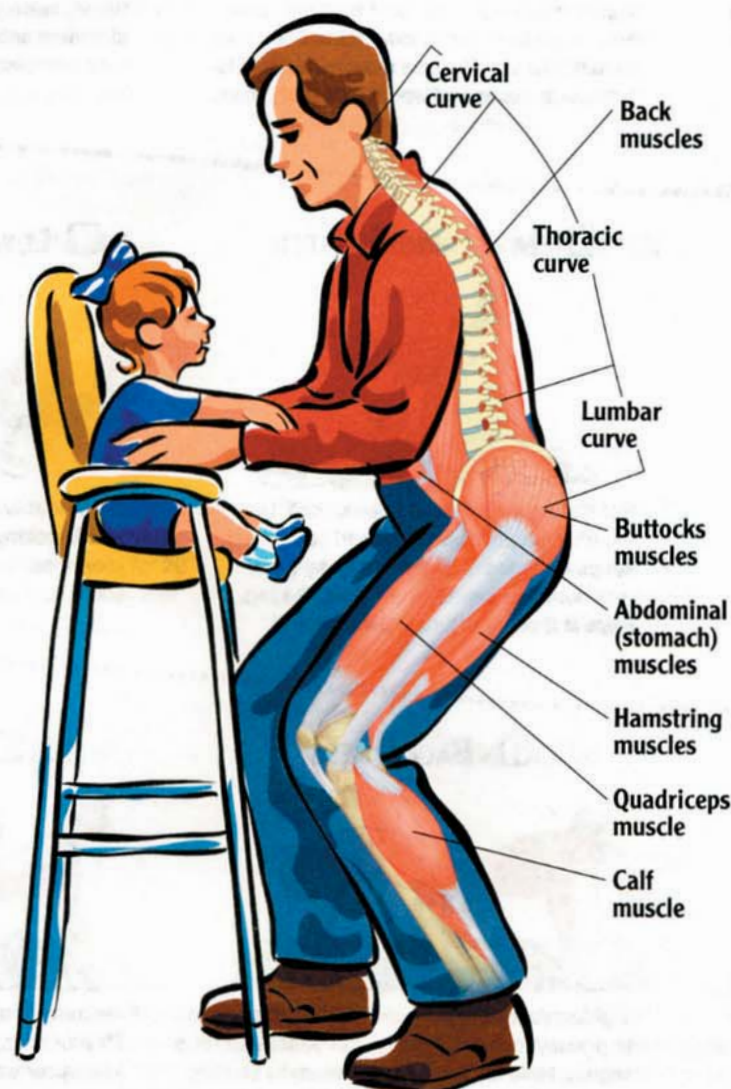
Exercise can strengthen your back so that you're less prone to injury.

A Healthy Back

A healthy back supports the body's weight and lets you move freely. Back health depends on maintaining the balance of the back's three natural curves and keeping supporting muscles strong and limber. Learn more about your back, so you can know how to protect it.

The Back's Three Natural Curves

The spine has three natural curves: the **cervical**, **thoracic**, and **lumbar** curves. Maintaining these curves is part of good posture and makes you less prone to injury. The curves are maintained when you are relaxed and your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. This is also called a neutral position.



Your Back in Motion

As you sit, walk, bend, or lift, your back is always working. You can reduce wear and tear on your back by practicing good body mechanics:

- **Bend at the knees and hips**, not at the waist.
- **Hold loads close to your body.** When lifting, use your legs and tighten your abdominal muscles.
- **Don't twist your back.** Turn with your feet. Always face the load as you're lifting.
- **Know your limits.** Take breaks, and don't lift loads that are too heavy for you.

Supporting the Back

The muscles of your abdomen, back, buttocks, and thighs support your spine. By keeping these muscle groups strong and flexible, you help them do their jobs well. This lets you function better and reduces your risk of back injury.

Your 15-Minute Workout

This workout includes both stretching and strengthening exercises. Do it as often as suggested by your healthcare provider. As you work out, don't rush or strain. Use an exercise mat, pillow, or folded towel to protect your knees and other sensitive areas.



LYING

STARTING POSITION



Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Don't press your neck or lower back to the floor. Breathe deeply. You should feel comfortable and relaxed.

□ PELVIC TILT



Tighten your abdomen and buttocks, and press your lower back toward the floor. This should be a small, subtle movement. Hold for 5 seconds. Release. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

□ HIP LIFT



Slowly raise your hips upward. Tighten your abdomen and buttocks. Be careful not to arch your back. Hold for 5 seconds. Lower your hips to the floor. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

□ PARTIAL CURL-UPS



Cross your arms loosely. Tighten your abdomen and curl halfway up, keeping your head in line with your shoulders. Hold for 5 seconds. Uncurl to lie down. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

□ ELBOW PRESS



Lie face down, feet slightly apart, forehead on the floor. Press up on your forearms. Keep your abdomen and hips on the floor. Hold for 20 seconds. Lower slowly. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Return to starting position.

LYING

□ SINGLE/DOUBLE LEG PULL



Pull one knee to your chest. Hold for 20 seconds. Then release. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch legs. For a double leg pull, pull both legs to your chest at the same time. Repeat 2 or ____ times.

□ HAMSTRING STRETCH



Put a towel behind one knee or calf. Use the towel to pull the leg toward your chest, keeping the leg straight or slightly bent. Hold for 20 seconds. Then lower the leg. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch legs.

□ LOWER BACK ROTATION



Drop both knees to one side and turn your head, looking in the other direction. Keep your shoulders flat on the floor. Hold for 20 seconds. Slowly switch sides. Repeat 2 or ____ times.

□ HIP ROTATOR STRETCH



Rest your right ankle on your left knee. Place a towel behind your left thigh and use it to pull the knee toward your chest. Feel the stretch in your buttocks. Hold for 20 seconds. Release. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch legs.

□ KNEE LIFT



Lift one bent knee and move it toward your upper body. Keep your abdominal muscles tight and your back flat on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 or ____ times. Switch legs.

HANDS AND KNEES

STARTING POSITION



Move to your hands and knees. Keep your knees under your hips and your hands under your shoulders. Keep your spine in a neutral position (not arched or sagging). Be sure to maintain your neck's natural curve.

□ BACK PRESS



Tighten your abdominal and buttocks muscles to press your back upward. Let your head drop slightly. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

□ BACK RELEASE



Relax your abdominal and buttocks muscles, lift your head, and let your back sag. Be sure to keep your weight evenly distributed. Don't sit back on your hips. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

□ ARM REACH



Stretch one arm straight out in front of you. Don't raise your head or let your supporting shoulder sag. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times. Switch arms.

□ LEG REACH



Extend one leg straight back. Don't arch your back or let your head or body sag. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times. Switch legs.

STARTING POSITION



Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Shift your weight slightly forward to avoid rounding your back. Relax, and keep your ears, shoulders, and hips aligned.

SIDE STRETCH



Stretch your right arm overhead. Slowly bend to the left. Don't twist your torso. Hold for 20 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch to the other side.

SHOULDER SQUEEZE



Raise your arms to shoulder height, elbows bent and palms forward. Move your arms back, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

SHOULDER SHRUG



Raise both of your shoulders as high as you can, as if you were trying to touch them to your ears. Keep your head and neck still and relaxed. Hold for a count of 5. Release. Repeat 5 or ____ times.

SEATED ROTATION



Fold your arms, elbows just below shoulder height. Turn from the waist with hips forward. Turn your head last. Hold for a count of 5. Return to starting position. Repeat 5 or ____ times. Switch sides.

LOWER BACK STRETCH



Sit with your feet well apart. Bend forward and touch the floor with the backs of your hands. Relax and let your body drop. Hold for 20 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 2 or ____ times.

CALF STRETCH



Face a wall 2 feet away. Step toward the wall with one foot. Place both palms on the wall and bend your front knee. Lean forward, keeping the back leg straight and the heel on the floor. Hold for 20 seconds. Switch legs.

QUAD STRETCH



Stand arm's length from a wall. Place one hand on it. With your other hand, grasp your ankle on the same side. Pull the heel toward your buttocks. Don't arch your back. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch legs.

WALL SLIDE



Stand with hips and shoulders touching a wall. Keep your feet hip-width apart and your ears, shoulders, hips, and feet in a line. If needed, place a rolled-up towel behind the small of your back.



Step forward about 2 feet, keeping your back against the wall. Slide down into a sitting position. Don't let your hips go below your knees. Hold for 5 seconds, then slide up. As you get stronger, hold the position longer.

HIP FLEXOR STRETCH



Kneel on the floor. Put one foot on the floor in front of you, with the knee slightly bent. If you need to, hold on to a chair for balance. Tighten your abdomen.



Move your hips forward, keeping your back and shoulders upright. Feel the stretch in the front of your hip. Hold for 20 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat 2 or ____ times. Switch sides.

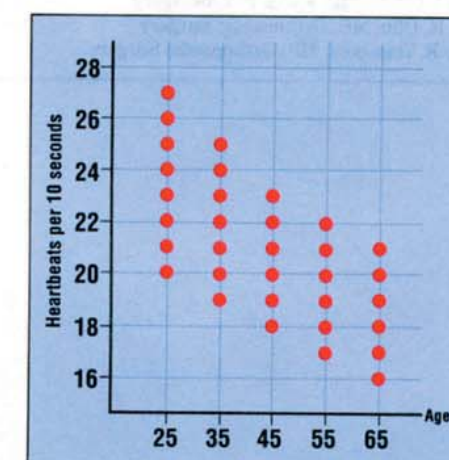
Moving Aerobically

Aerobic exercise makes your body use more oxygen. It conditions the heart and lungs and tones muscles. And it can help you control your weight. All of this helps keep your back in good shape. Choose exercises you enjoy. Types of aerobic exercise include walking, swimming, bicycling, running, cross-country skiing, water aerobics, and many others. Choose one or a combination to fit your mood and the season. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes. Aim for at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 to 5 times a week.



Target Heart Rate

A goal of aerobic exercise is to reach your **target heart rate (THR)** for at least 20 minutes. Right after exercise, take your pulse. Use two fingers (not your thumb!) to find your pulse at the wrist. Count how many beats you feel during 10 seconds. Compare the result to the THR for your age on this chart. If you're new to exercising, aim for the low end of the target range. As you become more fit, you can aim for the high end, but don't exceed it. To keep from exceeding your THR during exercise, check your breathing. You should be a little out of breath, but not so much that you can't talk.



Making a Habit of Back Exercise

Use the chart below to keep track of how often you exercise. Make extra copies of the chart as needed. Check the upper half of the box each day you do a morning workout and the lower half after you exercise in the evening. Then congratulate yourself for your good work!

		S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Week 1	AM							
	PM							
Week 2	AM							
	PM							
Week 3	AM							
	PM							
Week 4	AM							
	PM							

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