

Good Moves for Back Power

The key to a pain-free back is general fitness and having strong muscles in the abdomen and lower back. The following exercises can build strength and flexibility in your abdomen and lower back, which can help prevent back pain. They're so easy you can do them lying down.

BENT LEG SIT-UP

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Slowly raise your head and shoulders and extend your hands toward your knees as shown. Keep your middle and lower back on the floor, raising your upper body 30-45 degrees off the floor; don't strain your neck. Hold for 10 seconds; gradually increase to 60 seconds. Try 5 or 10.



KNEE TO CHEST

Lie on your back with your legs outstretched on the floor. Slowly bring one knee close to your chest, hugging your thigh. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat with your other leg. Alternating, try 5-10 reps per leg.



BACK PRESS

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Flatten your lower back gently pressing against the floor and raise your hips slowly; your abdominal muscles will tighten as you raise your hips. Hold for 15 seconds. Relax and repeat 5-10 times.



Self-Help Relief for Back Strain

1. During the first 24-48 hours, **apply** a cold compress for 15 minutes, four times a day. After 48 hours, try a heating pad or warm bath.
2. **Take** an over-the-counter pain reliever such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin (unless your health care provider has advised against it).
3. **Limit** bed rest to one or two days, followed by a gradual return to daily activities. Research shows that longer bed rest may slow the healing process.
4. If you have minor back pain, **try** to keep up your daily activities as pain allows and even include some gentle exercise.
5. **Slowly** return to activities such as lifting, pushing, pulling or repetitive bending or twisting.



See your health care provider if:

Pain has not eased after 72 hours of self care, or pain gets progressively worse.

You have numbness or weakness in one or both legs or feet.

You have difficulty walking, standing or moving.

Pain results from a fall, or blow to your back.

You feel numb in the groin or rectal area.

Pain radiates down an arm or leg.

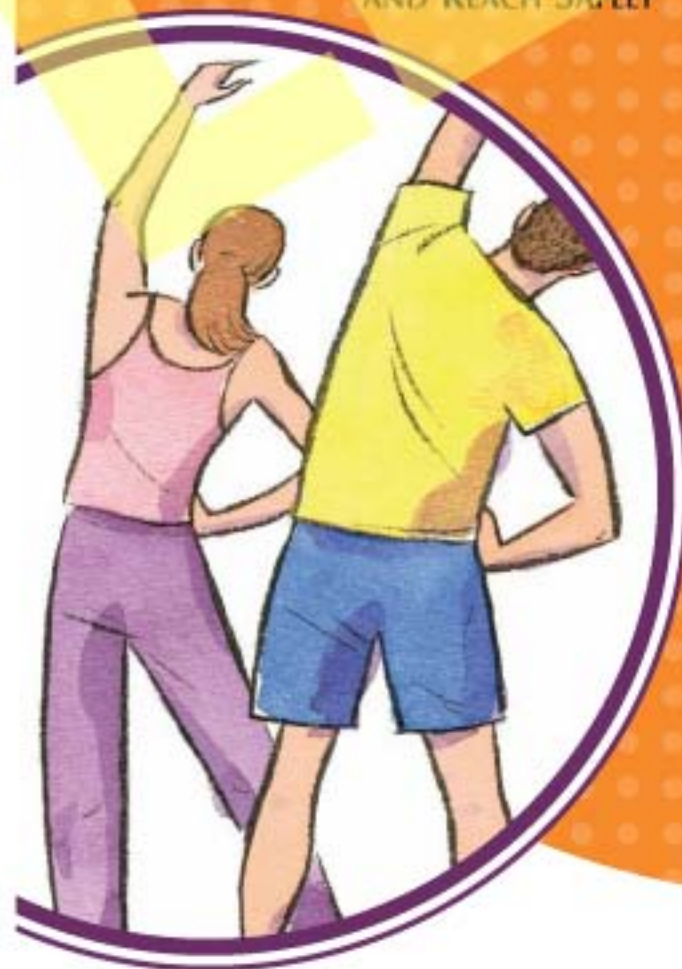
You can't control your bowels or bladder.

Pain is accompanied by fever, chills, sweating, nausea, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss or other signs of illness.

Final thought: Keeping your back healthy can save you from injury, aggravating pain and physical limitations. Don't be one of the many people living with a "bad" back. Stay aware of your back as you sit, stand, lift and reach, and take the proper precautions.

BACK BASICS

HOW TO SIT, STAND, LIFT AND REACH SAFELY



YOUR HARD-WORKING BACK

Your back helps you sit, stand, reach, lift — even sleep. It never rests. No wonder 4 out of 5 adults experience low-back pain sometime during their lives.

The good news: When it comes to back pain prevention, a little safety and common sense go a long way. Learn how you can take care of your hard-working back — on the job and at home.



Steps to a Healthy Back

Taking care of your back will keep those annoying and sometimes debilitating aches away. **Back basics:**

LISTEN to your body. If your back hurts, stop what you're doing. Change position often if you have to sit or stand for long periods of time.

LIFT safely. Many back injuries are a result of overstraining the back when lifting.

PREVENT falls. Slips, trips and falls cause the body to jerk and pull in awkward directions and positions, which can lead to back injuries. Keep pathways clear of clutter at home and at work ... secure loose carpeting ... watch your step.

PERFECT your posture. Your back works harder when you slouch. Maintain good posture by holding your shoulders in a natural position and tucking in your stomach muscles.

MANAGE stress. Anxiety and stress tighten the muscles in your back, making them less flexible and more injury prone. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, gentle stretching and peaceful meditation.

SLEEP smart. Sleeping on your side on a supportive, medium-firm mattress is good for the back.

TRIM your waistline. In addition to raising your risk for serious diseases, excess belly fat adds back stress and strain.

What's Behind Back Pain?

The back is supported by the spine, which is constructed of 24 joined bones. These bones, called **vertebrae**, are stacked on top of each other and are cushioned by soft discs that act as shock absorbers. Holding the vertebrae together and keeping the spine upright are tough ligaments (rope-like fibers) and back muscles.

Back pain occurs most often in the lumbar area, or low back, usually from strained muscles and ligaments after lifting, prolonged sitting, sudden awkward movements, or as a result of degenerative changes to the lumbar discs.



Lift It Right

Get close to the load as if you're hugging the object.

Keep a normal, upright position as you lift.

Tighten your stomach muscles (but don't hold your breath).

Bend your knees, not at your waist, and keep your back straight.

Use your leg muscles as your primary power, not your back. Your leg muscles are the strongest you have.

Turn with your feet.

Don't twist your back when holding a heavy object.

Use tools and lifting machines, or ask someone to help you whenever possible.

Remember: Bending at the waist while lifting or using your back can lead to low-back pain and strain. Instead, use your strong leg muscles no matter what you're doing — on-the-job tasks, or at-home activities such as yard work, housework, even playing with the kids.

More reasons to stop smoking:

It increases the risk of spinal fracture and disc rupture. A smoker's cough may hurt the back by putting pressure on the discs; smokers are more likely to develop low back pain than nonsmokers.

Back Belts: Helpful or Harmful?

People who lift on the job often rely on back belts, also called back supports or abdominal belts, to help prevent back injury. Scientific evidence does not support claims that back belts prevent injury, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In fact, workers who use back belts might be tempted to lift a too-heavy load, thinking the back belt will prevent strain. **The bottom line:** Whether or not you use a back belt, lift carefully and correctly.

3 Ways to Check Your Posture

You probably think you don't need lessons in how to sit and stand. After all, you do both every day. But did you know these activities can tire your back muscles and even lead to injury over time? Pay attention to your posture.

1. Think about the three curves of your spine: your **neck** (cervical curve), your **middle back** (thoracic curve), and your **lower back** (lumbar curve). Avoid creating an unnatural curve by slouching or arching your back.
2. If you're **sitting**, are your feet flat on the floor? Is your low back against the chair's backrest? You can use a small pillow or rolled towel if your chair has poor lumbar support.
3. Are you sitting or standing with your **shoulders** up in a natural position and in line with your hips? To support your back and upper body, try to keep your abdominal muscles tucked in.

