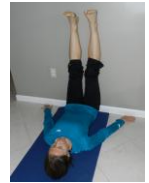


Easing Lower Back Pain: Strengthen and Stretch the Muscles that Support Your Spine!

Almost everyone endures lower back pain at some point in time. Pain can be caused by a variety of reasons ranging from serious traumatic injury, to birth defects, degenerative conditions, mishaps, and overuse. If you are experiencing chronic back pain, I strongly encourage you to see a physician; a physician who is interested in your long-term back health not one looking for a quick fix.

Fortunately, lower back pain is often a temporary condition, and there are ways to help ease the pain and build a stronger spine. Provided your physician has cleared you for such exercise, below are a few simple exercises and stretches that you can do in your own home to promote a healthier and happier back. Unless otherwise specified, each pose should be held at least ten seconds and/or for five deep breaths. Note that if any of these exercises “hurt” beyond feeling a gentle stretch, modify your position or stop performing the exercise.

Legs up the Wall: Lay on your back with your back side pressed against a wall. Your legs should be bent with your feet resting flat on the wall. Gradually scoot closer to the wall as you extend your legs until they are straight on the wall (your body should resemble an “L”). Relax your feet, and enjoy this gentle stretch of your hamstrings and lower back.



Cobra: Lay flat on your stomach with your elbows bent directly beside you and the palms of your hands on the floor beside your middle ribs. Press the tops of your legs and feet into the floor as you gradually roll up, using the strength of your back to lift your head and chest off of the mat. Lengthen through the tailbone as you lift. Drop your shoulders away from your ears. Eventually, you can rest on your elbows or extend the arms straight and lift the chest high for a greater stretch.

Superman/Woman: This pose is similar to Cobra, but instead of placing the hands on the floor, take your arms out in front of you and raise your arms as you lift the head and chest. To increase the intensity, point your toes and lift your legs off of the floor.



Cow/Cat: Come on to your hands and knees with the tops of your feet resting on the floor (hands and elbows should be directly below your shoulders, knees should be directly below your hips). Feet should be hip-width apart. Balance your weight in the center to start. With each inhale, let the abdomen drop toward the floor as your tailbone lifts high and you look up while keeping the neck long – resembling a cow. With your exhale breath, arch your back and shoulders like a scared cat and look towards your abdomen. Repeat this approximately ten times.



Table with Extension: Come back to the balanced pose on your hands and knees and extend your right arm out as far as you can in front of you, balancing on your other three limbs. Change to your left arm after five breaths. For your

next set, you can increase the intensity by extending your right arm and left leg in opposite directions, balancing on the other two limbs. Change sides after five breaths.

Child's Pose: Return back to your central position on your hands and knees and slowly shift your weight back and you bring your tailbone to rest on your heels while your arms extend out in front of you. Rest your forehead on the floor and enjoy the stretch through the back and hips. If your hips cannot reach back to your heels, you may experiment with placing a pillow in between your heels/calves and your hips. Finally bring the arms by your side with your palms face up and take a few more breaths.



Reclining Twist: Roll on to your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Take in a deep breath and with the exhale, allow your knees to drop to your left side, while your arms extend out in opposite directions on the floor and you look over your right shoulder. You may place a pillow or another support under your knees to add support for your back and hips in this posture. After five complete breaths, bring your knees back to the center and repeat this exercise with the knees going to the right/looking over your left shoulder. After five breaths, return to the center.

For a bonus, let both knees fall out to each side – in opposite directions. Hold this for five breaths, and then extend the legs out straight.

Take an inhale breath and roll up gently with the exhale to finish the sequence. Through lengthening and strengthening the muscles in your back and the muscles that support your back, you should begin to notice some immediate and long-term relief. If you would like to learn more about strengthening and stretching your back and core muscles, a good Pilates class and yoga class is highly recommended. Feel free to contact me for recommendations. As always, make sure you choose a good, qualified instructor to lead you, and hopefully you will be well on your way to better back health.