

## EXERCISES TO SAFEGUARD YOUR BACK

I am often asked what the best exercises are for those with low back pain.

There is no one exercise or set of exercises that rise above the others. A study several years ago had patients performing different exercises and observed their results.

The most important factor was simply doing the exercises on a daily or regular basis. The actual exercise was not as important as the activity.

Given that, there are still a few typical and common exercises that everyone seems to agree upon. Stretches should be held for 15-30 seconds. Long, easy stretches are the most productive. It allows your muscle to gradually relax and lengthen. Stretches should not be painful or cause numbness. Having a sense of tightness or discomfort is expected.

A very common stretch is the Hamstring Stretch. This is the large group of muscles on the backside of your thigh. Tight muscles here will tighten your low back.

To stretch your hamstring, lie on your back and bend one leg at the knee. Extend the other leg straight up in the air and lay a towel over the arch of the lifted foot. Gently pull on the towel, stretching your hamstring and calf muscle. Hold 30 seconds and switch legs. You can do this 1-3 times.

A Piriformis Stretch helps loosen your buttock, which can cause back and leg pain. Lie on your back, cross one leg over the other and pull the knee towards the opposite shoulder. For example, use your right hand to pull your right knee towards your left shoulder. Now put your left hand onto the right ankle, also pulling towards your left shoulder. You should feel your buttock stretch. Again hold 30 seconds.

A Back Stretch works to increase the normal curve in your low back. Lie on your stomach and leave your pelvis on the floor. Use your arms to push your upper body off the floor, like a push-up. Hold for 30 seconds, relax and repeat 1-3 times.

The above exercises are to increase your flexibility. To improve your strength, you need to do the following repetitive exercises:

- To do Leg Raises, lie on your stomach with your legs straight out. Now lift one leg 1-2 inches from the floor. You will feel your buttock and hamstring tighten. Repeat up to 20 times each leg.
- Do the Bridge exercise. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Keep your knees together. Tighten the muscles of your lower abdomen and buttock and slowly raise your hips up from the

- floor. Your buttock will come off the floor 3-6 inches. Repeat this up to 20 times.
- Do a Backwards Sit-up. Lie on your stomach with your legs straight out. Now lift your head and upper body upward, arching your low back. This will work to strengthen this area. Do this up to 20 times.

All exercises and stretches should be done using good form and without pain. It is best to gradually build up your program rather than trying too many repetitions.

All back problems are not the same. Your doctor of chiropractic may give you specific exercises for your condition.

*Information taken from American Chiropractic Association*

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