

EXERCISING

WITH

LOWER BACK PAIN



Lower back pain is one of the most common medical complaints in the world. Don't let low back pain get you down! A well-designed exercise program can help speed recovery from low back pain, reduce pain levels, and possibly prevent reinjury. In fact, regular physical activity has been shown to increase muscle strength and endurance, enhance mobility and reduce the risk of falling is superior to spine therapy at helping people cope with back pain and at keeping it under control! The key to maximizing the benefits of exercise is to follow a well-designed program that you can stick to over the long-term.

Getting Started

- The goal of exercise training is to improve overall fitness (cardiovascular, muscle strength and endurance, flexibility, coordination and function).
- Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program and ask if they have specific concerns about you doing exercise. Most people do very well with regular exercise and sufficient time, but some people do need surgery.
- The goal of exercise training is to improve overall fitness (cardiovascular, muscle strength and endurance, flexibility, coordination and function) while minimizing the stress to the lower back.
- Choose low-impact activities, such as walking, swimming, and cycling.
- Strong abdominals, back, and leg muscles are essential for helping you maintain good posture and body mechanics. Once the acute pain subsides, you can begin doing light strengthening-training exercises designed to help your posture.
- Yoga and tai chi may help relieve or prevent lower back pain by increasing flexibility and reducing tension. Be careful, however, not to do any poses that could exacerbate your condition.
- Start slowly and gradually progress the intensity and duration of your workouts. Do low- to moderate-intensity cardiovascular exercise for 20 to 60 minutes at least three to four days per week.

Exercise Cautions

- Avoid high-impact activities such as running.
- While low-impact aerobic activities can be started within two weeks of the onset of lower back pain, exercises that target the trunk region should be delayed until at least two weeks after the first sign of symptoms.
- Never exercise to the point of pain—if something hurts, don't do it.

Your exercise program should be designed to maximize the benefits with the fewest risks of aggravating your health or physical condition. Consider contacting a certified health and fitness professional* who can work with you and your health care provider to establish realistic goals and design a safe and effective program that addresses your specific needs.

*If your health care provider has not cleared you for independent physical activity and would like you to be monitored in a hospital setting or a medical fitness facility, you should exercise only under the supervision of a certified professional. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has two groups of certified fitness professionals that could meet your needs. The ACSM Certified Clinical Exercise Specialist (CES) is certified to support those with heart disease, diabetes and lung disease. The ACSM Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist (RCEP) is qualified to support patients with a wide range of health challenges. You may locate all ACSM-certified fitness professionals by using the ProFinder at www.acsm.org.

For more information, visit www.exerciseismedicine.org or e-mail eim@acsm.org.

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