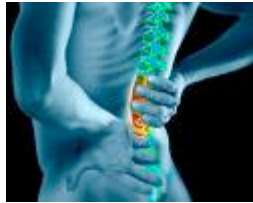


Take one!

# Lower Back Pain

Back pain is a common complaint. Most people in the United States will experience low back pain at least once during their lives. Back pain is one of the most common reasons people go to the doctor or miss work.



On the bright side, you can take measures to prevent or lessen most back pain episodes. If prevention fails, simple home treatment and proper body mechanics will often heal your back within a few weeks and keep it functional for the long haul. Surgery is rarely needed to treat back pain.

You may be able to avoid back pain by improving your physical condition and learning and practicing proper body mechanics.

## To keep your back healthy and strong:

- **Exercise.** Regular low-impact aerobic activities — those that don't strain or jolt your back — can increase strength and endurance in your back and allow your muscles to function better. Walking and swimming are good choices. Talk with your doctor about which activities are best for you.
- **Build muscle strength and flexibility.** Abdominal and back muscle exercises (core-strengthening exercises) help condition these muscles so that they work together like a natural corset for your back. Flexibility in your hips and upper legs aligns your pelvic bones to improve how your back feels.
- **Quit smoking.** Smokers have diminished oxygen levels in their spinal tissues, which can hinder the healing process.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight puts strain on your back muscles. If you're overweight, trimming down can prevent back pain.

## Exercises to strengthen lower back:

### Abdominal Contractions

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and hands resting below ribs.
2. Tighten abdominal muscles to squeeze ribs down toward back.
3. Be sure not to hold breath.
4. Hold 5 seconds.
5. Relax.
6. Repeat 10 times.



### Wall Squats

1. Stand with back leaning against wall.
2. Walk feet 12 inches in front of body.
3. Keep abdominal muscles tight while slowly bending both knees 45 degrees.
4. Hold 5 seconds.
5. Slowly return to upright position.
6. Repeat 10 times.



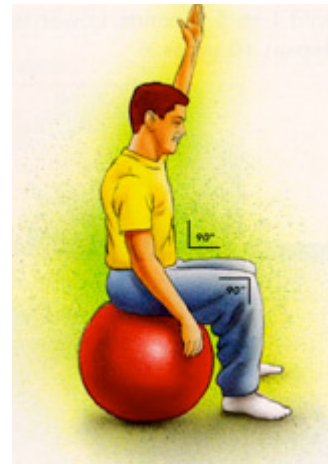
## Single Knee to Chest Stretch

1. Lie on your back with both knees bent.
2. Hold thigh behind knee and bring one knee up to chest.
3. Hold 20 seconds.
4. Relax.
5. Repeat 5 times on each side.



## Sitting on Stability Ball

1. Sit on ball with hips and knees bent 90° and feet resting on floor.
2. Slowly raise arm over head and lower arm, alternating right and left sides.
3. Slowly raise and lower heel, alternating right and left sides.
4. Slowly raise one heel and raise opposite arm over head. Alternate opposite arm and heel.
5. Marching: Slowly raise one foot 2 inches from floor, alternating right and left sides.



## When to see a doctor:

Most back pain gradually improves with home treatment and self-care. Although the pain may take several weeks to disappear completely, you should notice some improvement within the first 72 hours of self-care. If not, see your doctor.

In rare cases, back pain can signal a serious medical problem. Contact a doctor if your back pain:

- Is constant or intense, especially at night or when you lie down
- Spreads down one or both legs, especially if the pain extends below your knee
- Causes weakness, numbness or tingling in one or both legs
- Causes new bowel or bladder problems
- Is associated with pain or throbbing (pulsation) in your abdomen, or fever
- Follows a fall, blow to your back or other injury
- Is accompanied by unexplained weight loss



Also, see your doctor if you start having back pain for the first time after age 50, or if you have a history of cancer, osteoporosis, steroid use, or drug or alcohol abuse.

