

A GUIDE TO

# BACK EXERCISES



SUPPORTING SELF-TREATMENT OF BACK PAIN



BACK TO YOURSELF



BACK TO YOURSELF

Supporting Self-Treatment of Back Pain

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### **Disclaimer**

This guidebook does not intend to prescribe or treat any health-related condition. Back2Yourself makes no representations regarding the appropriateness, efficacy or suitability of the exercises included in this complementary guide. All information stated should in no way be considered as a substitute to medical treatment prescribed by a licensed health care professional.

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# Introduction

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Have you tried treatments and medications which promise to cure your back pain but fail to deliver? Have you missed work or important family occasions because of back pain? Has back pain taken total control of your life?

## **Basic Facts about Back Pain**

If you have been suffering from acute, chronic or recurrent back pain, you are not alone. Approximately 80% of Americans have experienced back pain at least once in their lifetime, of whom 80% report recurrent episodes. At least \$50 billion is spent each year to relieve the debilitating effects of back pain -- the number one cause of missed work and the second most common reason for seeking medical care.

## **How Can Back2Yourself Help You?**

Back2Yourself is an innovative online exercise program designed for people who suffer from back pain. Our interactive program is flexible and can be tailored to your unique needs and performed conveniently in the comfort of your own home, at your own pace. Through daily exercises, self-evaluation tracking and support from our professional team, Back2Yourself can help you relieve your back pain within a few weeks of continuous adherence to

our program. Our method is not only about temporary relief. We strive to assist you in maintaining a strong, healthy and pain-free back for many years to come.

### **Back2Yourself Core Concepts:**

The professional staff at Back2Yourself understands that in order for you to be successful, the exercises must be done correctly and consistently. While most people can stick with a routine for a short period of time, it is difficult to stay motivated for the long haul.

Back2Yourself has therefore designed a comprehensive program based on these three fundamental components:

- Daily exercises demonstrated in easy-to-follow online videos and explanations to ensure correct technique.
- Self-assessment and progress tracking to help keep you motivated.
- Professional support to answer your questions and tailor the exercises for your personal needs.

If you are ready to get to the core cause of your back pain, then Back2Yourself offers you an effective, convenient, and affordable core conditioning program that you can start today, on your own schedule, at your own pace and in the comfort of your own home.

## Back Pain Information

Some people describe back pain as the worse pain they have ever had. When you feel so much pain it is easy to believe something is really wrong with you. However, back pain is rarely a sign of a serious problem.

### When should I seek medical help for my back pain?

- If you are 70 years or older with new back pain  
If the pain does not go away, even at night or when lying down.
- If you experience weakness in one or both legs, or have problems with bladder, bowel, or sexual function. These symptoms should be evaluated as soon as possible.  
If back pain is accompanied by unexplained fever or weight loss
- If there is a history of cancer, a weakened immune system, osteoporosis, or if you have used corticosteroids (e.g. prednisone) for a prolonged period of time  
If the back pain is a result of falling or an accident, especially for people over 50 years old.
- If the pain spreads into the lower leg. Particularly if the pain is accompanied by weakness of the leg.  
If the back pain does not improve within four weeks.

If none of the above applies to you, you can probably wait before seeking medical help.

## **Do I need a surgery?**

The most likely answer is “no.” Only a small minority of patients suffering from low back pain require surgery. When you are in pain, it is easy to imagine that a “simple” surgery will take off the pain. However, spine surgery is not simple at all. Surgery has risks of complications and the danger of making the back problem even worse.

Even when a surgery is successful, you still need to recover, undergo rehabilitation and commit to a lifetime routine of back exercises to prevent recurrence. Perhaps most significantly, studies show that, for most cases of back pain, there is no significant difference in the one-year outcome with surgery or without.

Surgery is often necessary if there is:

- Evidence of problems with the nerves at the base of the spinal cord.
- Specific back conditions like a tumor or infection.
- Severe weakness due to spinal stenosis or compression of a nerve root.

## **Do I need X-ray, CT or MRI?**

These technologies have not shown any measurable medical benefit for people suffering from pain for less than four weeks for two reasons:

- The required treatment usually stays the same regardless of the specific back abnormalities found.
- Abnormalities frequently do not explain the pain since many back abnormalities shown in these tests are also common in people who suffer no pain.

### **So what can I do to feel better?**

- Be patient. Most people will start to feel better within one to four weeks.
- Ease the pain with:
  - Heating pads can help with low back pain during the first few weeks. If cold packs help you, you can use them as well.
  - Over-the-counter pain medications, such as Ibuprofen, are usually all that you need. If medication is needed, it is usually more effective to take a dose on a regular basis for three to five days.
- Stay active. Many people are afraid that they will hurt their back further by remaining active. However, studies have shown that people with low back pain recover faster when they remain active. Activities like walking or swimming can be particularly helpful. Back exercises or stretching routines should not be used immediately after a new episode of back pain, but are important as symptoms start to resolve.

### **Why should I actively prevent recurrence?**



- Because back pain is so unpleasant and debilitating.
- If you do nothing, recurrence is very likely.
- You can not live on pain medication indefinitely:
  - Even OTC pain medications have side effects and can affect the stomach, the liver and other organs when taken day to day over a long period.
  - Prescribed pain medications can cause drowsiness and addiction.
  - Surgery is risky and unlikely to heal most back pain or prevent recurrence.

### **What can I do to prevent recurrence?**

There is significant benefit from a program of exercises to increase back flexibility and strengthen the muscles that support the back. It is also important to learn how to use your body correctly during everyday activities.

**Back2Yourself's video instructed back exercises program address back flexibility and muscles strength. Back2Yourself's core principals naturally assimilate into everyday activities.**

# How to Use This Exercise Guide

This exercise guidebook is designed as a complement to Back2Yourself.com, a web-based program devoted to providing simple, home-based exercises for relief of back pain. Consult your physician before initiating this exercise program.

Back exercises or stretching routines should not be used immediately after a new episode of back pain, but are important as symptoms start to resolve.

# Basic & Starting Positions



# Standing Posture

- Keep your feet about hip width apart. The knees and the hips should be in alignment over the heels.
- Slightly pull in the lower ribs to avoid dumping the belly.
- Pull the shoulder blades together down the back.
- The front and the back of the neck are kept long. The back of the head should be in alignment with the sacrum.
- Press down through the soles of the feet and reach up through the crown of the head.
- Pull the navel toward the spine. Lift the pelvic floor.

## Reminder

- ✓ Maintain the navel toward the spine and the pelvic floor lifted while breathing deeply and fully throughout the exercise.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure c



Figure d



Figure e



Figure f

# Table Position

- a. Position your hands shoulder width apart directly beneath the shoulders. Keep your knees hip width apart directly beneath the hips.
- b. Pull your shoulder blades down the back by bending your elbows slightly, trying to bring the elbows towards each other with the points of the elbow reaching directly behind you (not toward the sides) Once your shoulder blades and elbows are aligned, straighten your arms.
- c. Position the crown of your head directly away from the tail, so neck is aligned with the spine and both front and back of the neck are long. Energetically, reach the crown of the head and the tailbone away from each other, as if you could lengthen the spine. Pull the lower ribs in slightly to avoid dumping out the belly. Draw the navel towards the spine and lift the pelvic floor. Spread the fingers wide and press the hands into the mat.

## Reminder

- ✓ In this position, avoid tilting the hips. Keep the sacrum at the level. Imagine that a bowl of water sits on to the lower back.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure c

# Side Lying Position

- Rest your head on your arm, which is extended away from the body about 15-degrees.
- The shoulders and the hips are each aligned vertically.
- The knees are bent at about 90-degrees.
- The heels are aligned with the hips and the shoulders.
- Stabilize the core by lifting the lower ribs and the waist away from the floor. Pull the navel toward the spine. Maintain the core throughout the exercise.
- Bring the hand to the belly to help maintain vertical alignment of the hips throughout the exercise.

## Reminder

- ✓ Maintain the alignment of the hips, shoulders, and heels in this position.
- ✓ Before doing the exercise, engage and stabilize the core by lifting the low ribs and waist away from the floor and pulling the navel toward the spine.
- ✓ Avoid leaning the hips backwards or forwards. Keep them aligned vertically during the entire exercise.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure c



Figure d



Figure e



Figure f

# Specific Exercises



# Standing (exercise)

- a. Position your feet parallel to each other. Press down equally into the inner and outer ball of the foot and the inner and outer heel. The ankles are neither diving in towards each other nor are they rolling away from each other.
- b. Position the knees over the heels. The knee cap should be in alignment with the second toe.
- c. The hips are neither positioned forward nor back but they should be aligned directly over the heels. The pubic bone is moved slightly forward, and the tail is slightly tucked.
- d. Lower ribs are pulled in slightly to avoid dumping out in the belly, and the navel is pulled towards the spine.
- e. Loop the shoulders up and back and down to pull the shoulder blades down the back, as if lengthening the distance between the shoulders and the ears.
- f. The line of site is horizontal and the neck is aligned with the spine. The back of the head is in alignment with the sacrum so that the chin is neither positioned forward nor reaching back too far. The front and back of the neck are long so the chin is neither lifted nor lowered.
- g. Once you are in correct standing posture, energetically press down through the soles of the feet, and reach up through the crown of the head.
- h. Support the back with a strong core by drawing the navel toward the spine. Further strengthen the core by lifting the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles are located between the genitals and the anus. You can find those muscles by imagining stopping a stream of urine. Lifting the pelvic floor muscles will help you to feel the energetic lift from the soles of the feet all the way up the legs and torso and out the crown of the head.



# Standing Roll-down

- a. Find your proper standing posture.
- b. Inhale as you lift your arms overhead – your shoulder blades move down the back as your arms lift. Your rib cage should expand with the breath.
- c. Move your chin towards the chest. Exhale and begin the roll-down. Lower your shoulders and your head, rolling your spine down one vertebra at a time. The navel is pulled in very strongly towards the spine. Stretch the muscles of the back, allowing the weight of the head to pull you down. The arms should rest downward, hanging from your shoulders. Maintain the position with your neck soft and relaxed.
- d. Inhale and feel the back expand with your breath.
- e. Exhale as you begin to roll up. Pull the navel strongly toward the spine, as you roll upward, stacking one vertebra at a time.
- f. Return to your correct standing posture. Shoulder blades are pulled down to the back. Press your feet into the floor, reaching up to the crown.

## Reminder

- ✓ Match the movements with your breathing.
- ✓ As you roll down, allow only the weight of your head to pull your upper body down.
- ✓ The arms hang from your shoulders and prevent anchoring them to the lower legs.



Figure b



Figure c



Figure e



Figure f

# Core Breathing

A note about breathing:

In Pilates and some other forms of exercise, the practitioner is commonly guided to inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. In yoga, the practitioner inhales and exhales through the nose. Exhaling through the nose tends to slow the breath down, and thus allows us to extend the time it takes to complete a movement. Slower movement requires more muscle control and ultimately results in greater strength and flexibility. Slower breath may also result in better stamina. However, for the beginner, slower movements may be challenging and too tiring. Therefore, for the beginner, it may be more useful and practical to exhale through the mouth; as strength and stamina increase, begin to practice the exercises more slowly and exhaling through the nose to slow the breath.

These guidelines describe core breathing with the inhale and exhale through the nose. It is important to practice core breathing without movement, so that it is easier to practice this type of breath during the movement exercises. It is important to maintain the principles of core breathing during the movement exercises to get the maximum benefit from the exercise and to maintain proper back alignment to avoid injury. If movement exercises are too tiring or difficult to maintain the nose exhale, then exhale through the mouth.

As you inhale, the rib cage expands to accommodate the inflating lungs and the muscles between the ribs stretch, melting tension. As you exhale, the rib cage narrows and muscle tension is released. The muscles in the head and neck should feel relaxed. After a few minutes of intentional breathing in this way, you will begin to notice that tension is released with each exhale, leaving your body feeling more relaxed and comfortable after just a few minutes. You may also notice that your breath becomes deeper and fuller and that you can lengthen the time it takes to inhale and exhale. As the breath lengthens in this way, it feels as if more tension is melted on each inhale and released on each exhale.

## Seated in a chair

- a. In seated position, place your feet flat on the floor, have your thighs parallel and your knees hip width apart. Maintain the same alignment with your spine as you have in standing posture. Let your hands rest in your lap and allow your neck and shoulders to relax. Pull the navel in towards the spine, as if you are trying to imprint your spine with your navel.
- b. Inhale and exhale through your nose. Pull your navel towards your spine during inhale and exhale to maintain integrity in the core muscles. As you inhale, your ribcage expands and as you exhale your ribcage gets smaller. To make sure there is this movement in the ribcage, place your hands on your ribs as you breathe – you should feel your ribcage expanding during inhalation and getting smaller during exhalation. You should be able to breathe fully and deeply while maintaining your navel pulled towards your spine throughout the breathing practice.

## Supine

- a. Lie down on your back. Maintain the natural and comfortable curve of your lower spine; keep the lower ribs in slightly to avoid arching the back beyond the natural curve. Pull the navel in towards the spine, as if you are trying to imprint your spine with your navel, but avoid pressing the low back down and removing the natural curve.
- b. Inhale and exhale through your nose, keeping your navel towards your spine and your spine in a natural and comfortable position. As you inhale with your navel pulled towards the spine, the ribcage will expand to accommodate the inflating lungs and you will feel the back ribs pressing gently into the floor as the ribcage expands. Continue breathing in and out through your nose, with your navel towards your spine. To check on your breathing, place your hands on your ribcage. As you inhale, your ribs will expand; as you exhale the rib cage narrows. Your head and neck remain relaxed without any tension.

### Reminder

- ✓ Always check if you are doing the proper way of core breathing. On the inhale, the rib cage should expand. On the exhale, it should narrow down.



Seated Figure b



Supine Figure b

# Kissing Shoulders

## Seated in a chair

- a. Establish the correct seated posture – your feet are flat on the floor, thighs parallel, and knees are hip width apart. The spine is aligned as in proper standing posture. The shoulder and neck are relaxed. Navel is pulled toward the spine to maintain a strong core
- b. Position your hands at your sides, palms face away from each other and upper arm bones rotate externally (away from the heart).
- c. Pull your lower ribs in slightly. Inhale as you draw your shoulder blades up and back. Exhale as you slowly squeeze your shoulder blades together, beginning near the base of the neck and gradually moving down to the lower tips of the shoulder blades. Release and repeat.

## Lying on the floor

- a. Lie face down on the floor with your forehead gently resting on a small towel. Arms are positioned at your sides with the palms facing the ceiling. Pull your navel toward the spine. Keep your legs and feet together on the floor.
- b. Continue with instruction “c” as in the seated position, described above. Your arms will lift away from the floor but remain parallel to the floor.

## Reminder

- ✓ Match the movement with the breath.
- ✓ Avoid arching your spine.
- ✓ As you lift your arms, maintain the navel engaged toward the spine. Prevent any tension in the head and neck.



Sitting Figure a



Lying Figure b

# Table & Cat / Cow

- a. Establish the correct alignment in a table position. Pull the shoulder blades down the back and anchor them in this position. Elbows should point straight back, elbow creases face forward.
- b. Inhale into cow pose – Reach your heart forward and up, as you reach your tailbone up and back, lengthening the spine as you move into this shape. Pull your navel towards your spine to maintain integrity in the core muscles.
- c. Exhale into the cat pose – Move your heart and tail down as you press your mid-back up. Pull your navel toward your spine to help your mid-back stretch and broaden. Spread your fingers wide and push the floor away with your hands. Head and neck are relaxed.
- d. Continue moving slowly between cow and cat pose, matching the movement to breath, staying for a few seconds in each pose before transitioning to the next.

## Reminder

- ✓ Support your lower back by pulling your navel into your spine during the exercise.



Figure a



Figure c

# Elbow to Knee

- a. Establish the correct table position. Pull the shoulder blades down the back and anchor them in this position. Elbows should point straight back, elbow creases face forward.
- b. Inhale deeply as you lift one leg and its opposite arm simultaneously. The heel reaches back and up as the hand reaches forward to lift the arm. Stabilize the torso by pressing down strongly with the hand, fingers spread wide, and knee on the floor and pull the navel towards the spine. Maintain a level sacrum.
- c. Exhale as you bring elbow to knee as you lower the head and tailbone as in cat pose. Pull the navel towards the spine and lift the pelvic floor. Maintain your balance by pressing firmly into the hand and knee.
- d. Return the knee and hand to the floor at the end of the exhale.
- e. Repeat the same movement using the arm and leg of the other side.

## Reminder

- ✓ It is important to keep the sacrum level, especially when you lift the arm and leg. Don't spill the imaginary bowl of water resting on your
- ✓ It is important to move the shoulder blades down the back as you lift and lower the arm.
- ✓ To maintain balance and stability during the movement, press strongly through the hand and the knee. Pull the navel up toward the spine and lift the pelvic floor.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure c



Figure d

# Bridging

- a. Establish the proper alignment – Lie on your back with your knees bent. The soles of your feet are hip width apart and press evenly into the floor. Your thighs are parallel and the knees are no more than hip width apart. Your shoulders, neck and jaw should be relaxed and comfortable. Arms relax by the sides. Pull your navel to the spine and gently press the top of the sacrum towards the floor.
- b. Inhale into the chest with the navel moving toward the spine, as you exhale, press the feet strongly into the mat as you lift your hips towards the ceiling. With your hips lifted, inhale, filling the chest with air while maintaining navel pulled toward spine. Allow your upper spine to arch slightly as you inhale. Protect the low back by keeping the thighs parallel, thus maintaining a broad sacrum, and tucking the tailbone to prevent compression in the low back.
- c. Exhale as you return your spine to the mat, lowering one vertebra at a time, tailbone down last. Keep the hips level throughout the exercise.
- d. Inhale to prepare, then repeat the exercise, matching the movement to the breath.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure c

## Reminder

- ✓ Keep your hips level and your sacrum broad.
- ✓ Keep your tailbone tucked.
- ✓ To check if you are doing this exercise correctly, place your hands on your hips, following the movement of your hips. Note whether one hip is lower or higher than the other. You are doing the exercise correctly if both hips are even.

# Side Clam

- a. Establish the correct side lying position.
- b. On inhale, lift the knee of the upper leg as wide as you can, keeping the hips vertical and the feet touching. You should feel this work deeply in the muscles in your hip. On exhale, bring the knees back together. Make sure that the knees align vertically when you close the legs to be sure that the sacrum remains vertically aligned.
- c. Repeat the same exercise on the other side

## Reminder

- ✓ It is important to keep the sacrum aligned vertically throughout the exercise. Keep the knees directly on top of each other. Resist the temptation to lean the hips backwards or forwards.



Figure a



Figure b



# Relaxation Setup

- a. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet about 2 feet apart and knees resting against each other to allow your sacrum to be broad and relaxed.
- b. The back of your head should rest on the prominent part of your skull. You may want to use a small pillow or towel beneath the head for support.
- c. The front of the neck and the back of the neck are long.
- d. Relax the muscles of the back. Once they are relaxed you may want to place a cushion beneath the knees and let the back of the knees rest on the cushion.
- e. Let your hips and heels rest on the floor.
- f. Position your arms at a comfortable distance from the body with the palms open to the sky.

## Reminder

- ✓ Throughout the relaxation your eyes will be closed. You may want to use an eye pillow or small towel resting over the eyes so the eye lids feel heavy.



Figure a



Figure b



Figure d



Figure f

# Relaxation

- a. Make sure you are comfortable and ready for relaxation.
- b. Let your breath come and go naturally, no longer controlling your inhale and exhale. Let your jaw, neck and face relax. Your tongue is soft, moving away from the back of the teeth and the teeth are slightly parted. The muscles of the face are soft and relaxed. Your shoulders are soft as you move them down the back. You may need to adjust the shoulder blades by drawing them closer together so your heart feels open.
- c. You should feel comfortable. If you are not, make the necessary adjustments so you do feel comfortable.
- d. Focus your attention on noticing your breath and the sensations in your body. Notice your breath without controlling it. As thoughts come into your mind, set them aside and bring your attention back to your breathing. Let go of the thinking mind and allow yourself to be guided by the sensing body. It is typical for the mind to wander and be distracted by thoughts. When that happens, set those thoughts aside, and then refocus your attention back to noticing your breath.
- e. Imagine that each inhale softens and relaxes your muscles, and that each exhale releases muscle tension from the body. Allow the body to be fully supported by the floor, completely submitting to gravity. Imagine the breath entering the soles of the feet and passing like a wave up the legs, passing the knees, hips, torso, shoulders, neck, and out the top of the head. With your mind's eye, follow the wave of breath as it passes through the body, from the feet out of top of the head. Imagine each wave of breath cleansing the body of pain and tension, leaving the body feeling relaxed and comfortable. With each inhale, imagine that a bit of your pain dissolves and with each exhale release that pain from your body.
- f. Prepare to come out of your relaxation by wiggling you fingers and your toes to slowly transition back into movement. Begin to deepen your breath. Roll on to your side into your comfortable fetal position. Rest you head on your hands. Your shoulders, hips and knees are aligned vertically. Stay in the sensing body. Use the strength of your arms to press yourself up into your comfortable sitting position and out of your relaxation position and out of your relaxation.

# Testimonials



"I was having a lot of pain before starting your exercises this weekend and got relief after doing them. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!!!",  
Barbara Clark, NJ



"Today, after standing the whole day at work, I suddenly realized that my back didn't bother me anymore. I'm pulling in my belly and supporting my whole body. Now, even if I'm tired after work, I am really motivated to do the Back2Yourself exercises when I get home", Diane Gilbert, MA



It may sound odd, but listening daily to the instructions given in the videos changed the way I interact with my body. I find myself correcting my posture without even thinking about it. No other exercise technique has stayed with me like this one", Don McNeil, CT



"These exercises are really helpful. I started swimming again, which I could not do before Back2Yourself", Jeff Daniels, GA



"The Back2Yourself exercises are actually addicting and so easy to follow. I had been searching for back exercises on the Internet but they're always so hard to follow. Back2Yourself is different. It goes at the right pace and explains exactly what I need to do", Ruth Stevens, WA



"Thank you! That was great!", Justin LaGuardia, TN



"(while exercising) I understood something about my posture that was caused by (years of) avoiding pain. Thanks!", Claire Van-Hoosen, TX



"My back is gradually improving, thanks to Back2Yourself. Now I wish I had an interactive diet...", Natalie Cramer, CA



"It's nice to get up with Back2Yourself in the morning. Is it okay to exercise again in the evening?", Laura Fountain, TX

"Back2Yourself is really good. None of the exercises are too difficult to execute. Thanks to you, I feel more awake and energized in the mornings", Jason O'Connor, NY



"Each exercise is clearly explained and important points were emphasized, which helped me remember them. The relaxation section was very enjoyable, like having a personal trainer right there with me", Jim Austin, CA



"Great demonstration! Easy and clear!", Jill Ruby, OR

"I feel so much better already", Shirley O'Brian, NY



"Thank you very much for these exercises. That will be lots of help for my aching back", Jeff Collate, TX



"It's like having a personal coach at home", Brenda Lewis, WA

# Owner Notes

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# Owner Notes

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