



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
Trusted advice for a healthier life

Exercise to prevent and relieve back pain

Back pain shouldn't stand in the way of your exercise routine. However, when back pain strikes, you'll want to focus on workouts that will get you back to your normal activities as soon as possible — and that will help you maintain strong and flexible muscles that are less prone to injury.

Any exercise program should be customized to meet your specific needs and goals. If you are experiencing back pain, exercise should be introduced (or re-introduced) gradually and when you are feeling reasonably comfortable. If you were exercising regularly before an episode of back pain and then had to slow down or stop for a while, get back to your usual workouts slowly. Do a little less than you normally do (fewer minutes or repetitions) and steadily build back up to where you were before.



Building muscles

Stretching and strengthening both your back and abdominal muscles is important not only for treating low back pain, but to help prevent it as well. Strong abdominal muscles, for example, help maintain healthy posture and minimize back strain. In addition, the muscles of the upper legs should be flexible and strong to help support the muscles that support the back.

Stretching

Stretching is important for anyone who struggles with back problems. Supple, well-stretched muscles are less prone to injury. Shorter, less flexible muscles and connective tissues restrict joint mobility, which increases the likelihood of sprains and strains. Stretch regularly but gently, without bouncing, as that can cause tissue injury. Beginners should start by holding each stretch for a short time and gradually build up to holding each stretch for roughly 30 seconds.