



BACK PAIN PROTOCOL

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CAUSES AND TYPES OF BACK PAIN

Back pain can severely interfere with your life, from inhibiting your ability to perform everyday tasks to causing severe pain that leaves one in a constant state of discomfort. If you find that back pain has you down, don't lose hope! There are strategies you can employ to help manage the pain, inflammation, and loss of movement that come with back pain.

First, it is important to understand what type of back pain you have. Understanding the type of back pain can better help one determine the cause of the pain and thus help find a remedy that truly gets at the root of the issue. Below are different types of back pain, as well as the causes of the pain:

Flexion Dominant Back Pain

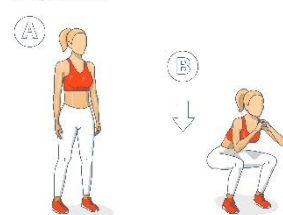
Flexion dominant back pain is often caused by damage to the disc, but not always. This type of pain follows a pattern that helps make it easier to detect, if this is what you are dealing with. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are your symptoms made worse with movement such as bending, lifting, or sitting?
- Do you have trouble straightening your back after getting up from a sitting position?
- Do you notice a lessening of pain after standing or walking for a short time?
- Do you feel pain when you cough or sneeze?
- Do you feel spine pain, leg pain, or a combination of both?
- Do you feel tingling or numbness in the affected area?
- Do you feel leg weakness?

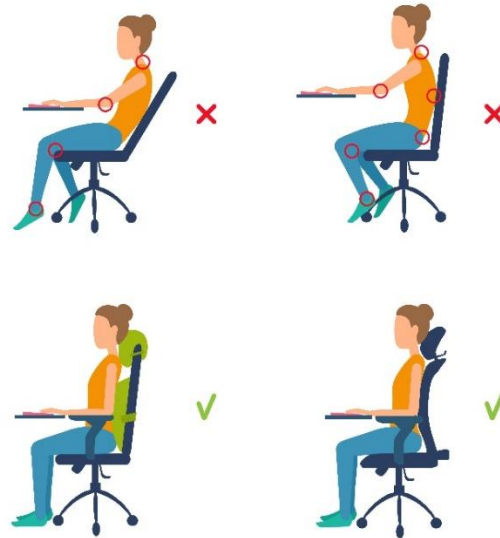
If you answered yes to the majority of these questions, you may have flexion dominant back pain. See “Exercises to Strengthen the Back” in this book for exercises you can perform to lessen the pain from this condition. In addition, try the suggestions below:

- ❖ Lift and squat the proper way by lifting with your legs, bending your knees, and keeping your back straight as you do so. Keep feet shoulder width apart and your head/eyes up. Tighten your stomach muscles and avoid twisting or bending. Lift objects close to your body.

SQUATS



- ❖ Take a closer work at your work station or office to make sure you have a workspace that helps promote good posture, a good chair that offers lumbar support, or even a standing work space. Eliminate other occupational risks if possible.
- ❖ Work on core muscle strength with exercises to tone this area. (See exercise section).
- ❖ Work on abnormally tight or weak hip muscles with exercises or stretches to strengthen them. (See exercise section).
- ❖ Try spinal mobility exercises. (See exercise section).



Extension Dominant Back Pain

This type of back pain is usually caused by joints at the back of the spine. These joints are referred to as zygapophyseal joints (Z joints for short). There are symptoms you can watch for to assess whether you have this type of back pain. Ask yourself the questions below:

- Do you find temporary relief when you sit or bend?
- Do you have pain after standing for long periods of time?
- Do you have pain after high impact activities?
- Do you find that your range of motion is stable and doesn't change in short periods of time?
- Does your back feel stiff on a regular basis?
- Do you ever have leg pain, tingling, or numbness in the affected area?
- Do you ever feel localized spinal pain?

If you answered yes to the majority of the questions above, you may have extension dominant back pain. There are some things you can do to help manage this type of pain.

See the suggestions below:

- ❖ Find ways to reduce pressure on the spine in extension.
- ❖ Try abdominal stabilizing exercises and hip mobility stretches (see exercises).
- ❖ Use flexed postures intermittently. (See posture section).
- ❖ Try acupuncture for pain relief.

Neurogenic Claudication

This type of back pain is actually a specific type of extension dominant back pain that often affects geriatric patients. The cause is often nerves that are compressed when the person stands or walks.

This type of back pain significantly limits a person's ability to walk for longer periods of time.

There are some symptoms to watch for if you suspect this is the type of back pain you are dealing with. Ask yourself the questions below:



- Are you asymptomatic when sitting?
 - When you rise to walk, do you feel pain, numbness, or weakness in the legs after a certain length of time?
 - Do you have any local spine pain? (Most people with this type of back pain do not have local spine pain).
- When your symptoms begin, do you feel the need to sit or bend to feel better?
 - Do you feel the need to walk bent over using a cane, walker, or even another object (such as a shopping cart when you are shopping)?

If you experience a majority of the symptoms above, you could have neurogenic claudication. This back pain can come and go in flares. During a flare, you may experience a great reduction in your walking tolerance and need frequent breaks.

There are some things you can do to manage this type of back pain. Try the suggestions below for help:

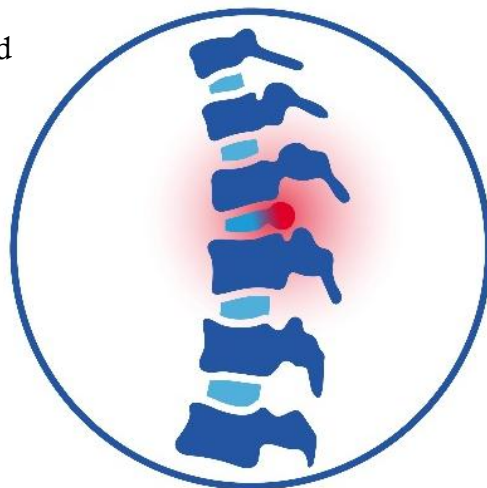
- ❖ Try flexion-based stretches throughout the day. (See exercise section).
- ❖ Temporarily reduce walking distances during flares but keep stretching.

- ❖ When you are not having a flare, try training and exercise to reduce pelvic anterior tilt when standing. (See exercise section).
- ❖ Avoid fighting through the pain you feel, as this could make things worse.
- ❖ Avoid “walking it off” in hopes that extra training will help.
- ❖ Work on abdominal strength exercises and hip mobility exercises. (See exercise section).

Inflammatory Back Pain

Those with inflammatory back pain often have a hard time getting a diagnosis. This type of back pain is less common than others. The cause of inflammatory back pain is inflammation in the spinal joints.

This may be to an autoimmune issue that causes the immune system to attack spinal joints. One example of this type of pain is ankylosing spondylitis.



Ask yourself the following questions to determine if you are experiencing this type of back pain:

- How old are you? This type of pain often appears in people under the age of 35 and is not associated with trauma of any kind.
- How long does your pain last? Inflammatory back pain often lasts for more than three months.
- Does your back pain ease when you exercise or engage in physical activity?
- Does your back seem to feel much better when you take NSAIDs like ibuprofen or naproxen?
- Does the pain worsen when you are immobile for a length of time? For example, is your pain worse in the early morning or at night?

If you answered yes to a majority of these questions, you might have inflammatory back pain. There are several things you can do to help manage this type of pain. See suggestions below:

- ❖ Try the “anti-inflammatory blend” under “natural remedies for back pain” in this book. It can help to reduce the inflammation that causes pain in the body.
- ❖ Exercise daily with gentle exercise and stretches that help to strengthen the back.

- ❖ Try low-impact functional strength training. (See exercise section).
- ❖ Try taking daily adaptogenic herbs and mushrooms that help stabilize the immune system. These include astragalus, reishi (*Ganoderma*), and lion's mane (*Hericium erinaceus*).



Figure 1. Astragalus



Figure 2. Lion's Mane



Figure 3. Reishi

Chronic Pain Disorders

A chronic pain disorder can cause back pain, but this type of disorder is very hard to diagnose and treat. This type of back pain is often caused by the nervous system not working correctly. It interprets stimuli as dangerous so the brain treats this as pain. Those with this condition are often dismissed by doctors or told “It’s all in your head.”. To help determine if this is the type of pain you are suffering from, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the location of your pain migrate to other parts of the body?
- Does the pain or type of pain vary quite a bit?
- Does the pain follow typical anatomic boundaries? (Most with this type of pain experience pain that doesn’t follow typical boundaries).
- When you are anxious or depressed, does your pain get worse?
- Are increases and decreases in pain not linked to any trauma?

If you answered yes to a majority of the questions above, you might have a chronic pain disorder. See a doctor to screen for any kind of anxiety or depression, as this often contributes to the disorder. If you are diagnosed with this type of back pain, try the following suggestions:

- ❖ Try taking a daily herbal supplement aimed at reducing anxiety and stress.



Figure 1. Skullcap



Figure 2. Motherwort

Nervine herbs like skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*), motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and lavender (*Lavandula*) may help you find peace both physically and mentally.



Figure 3. Lemon Balm



Figure 4. Lavender

- ❖ Try a daily adaptogenic herb or mushroom that helps your body better respond to stress. These include ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), ginseng, holy basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*/ *Ocimum sanctum*), or reishi (*Ganoderma*).



Figure 5. Ashwagandha



Figure 6. Holy Basil



Figure 7. St. John's Wort

- ❖ St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is a great nervine herb to try, as it has been linked to reduced depression and nerve pain.
- ❖ Daily exercise, such as going on a peaceful walk in nature, can be very helpful for strengthening the body, as well as reducing anxiety and depression.

Weight-Related Back Pain

Body weight and back pain are strongly connected. A 2010 review from the American Journal of Epidemiology showed that the risk of lower back pain was directly related to increases in body mass index (BMI). Body mass is a strong predictor of both lower back pain and internal disc disruption (IDD). Not only does excess weight put a strain on the back muscles, joints, and spine, fat tissue also triggers metabolic issues in the body that make back pain worse. Ask yourself the following questions if you suspect you may have weight-related back pain:

- When you measure your BMI, is it over 30? Obesity is characterized by a BMI of 30-40. Anything over 40 is considered morbidly obese. Those who are obese and morbidly obese are at a much higher risk of weight-related back pain. A BMI of 25-20 is considered overweight. This is not likely an indicator for weight related back pain, but it might be a good indicator that you need to eat healthier and exercise so you don't become obese.
- Do you suffer from other back conditions, such as a herniated disc or spine osteoarthritis? These are two back conditions that can be greatly exacerbated by being obese.

If you suspect weight-related back pain, it is never too late to start doing something about it! Consider the suggestions below to help get you back on track:

- ❖ Cut all sugar, alcohol, and processed foods from your diet. These are often the biggest contributors to excess weight and weight gain. In addition, cut carbohydrates and try to stay under 50 gram daily.
- ❖ Eat lean meats like mackerel, salmon or chicken. Bake instead of frying.
- ❖ Eat plenty of vegetables. They are rich in fiber which promotes a healthy digestive system.
- ❖ Daily exercise is imperative. It doesn't have to be rigorous at first, just start with what you can tolerate. Try daily walks and work your way to walking longer each day.
- ❖ Try low-impact strength training as you lose weight. You may gradually work your way up to moderate impact as you feel comfortable.
- ❖ Try a daily herbal supplement of saffron extract. Saffron has been shown to curb appetite and help people lose weight.
- ❖ Get eight hours of sleep each night to ensure you have the energy needed to get through each day. Too little sleep can lead to weight gain, as it makes the body more stressed and leads to cortisol production.

- ❖ Have your thyroid checked to make sure you don't have any kind of hypothyroid condition.
- ❖ Drink plenty of water each day to keep your body hydrated.
- ❖ Take adaptogenic herbs to help the body respond to stress better while limiting the amount of weight gain hormone (cortisol) produced. Try ginseng, reishi (*Ganoderma*), or ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*).
- ❖ Have hormones evaluated to make sure they are in balance. If your hormones are out of balance, try taking the adaptogenic herb Vitex daily.

When it comes to types of back pain, you may find that you aren't just suffering from one specific type of back pain, but a combination of more than one listed above. If you are obese, the odds of having more than one type of back pain are greater because this weakens multiple body systems that are essential to healthy muscles, tissues, and bones. The next section focuses on exercises you can do each day to strengthen the muscles in your body and relieve back pain.

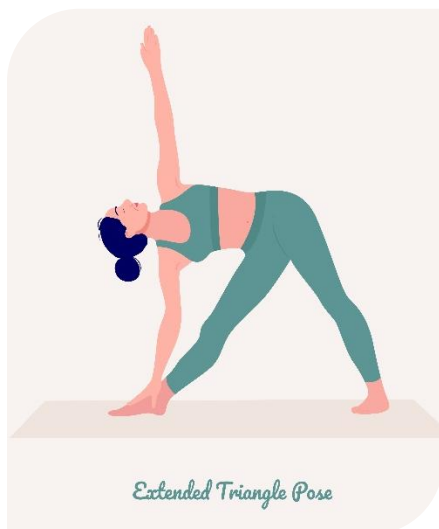
EXERCISES FOR STRENGTHENING THE BACK

With almost any back issue, exercise is a great way to both strengthen the back and core to help relieve pain. Each type of back pain has its own set of exercises that can help target the problem areas. The list of exercises below has been known to help with back pain. Try to align your type of pain with the most effective exercise to help that particular issue.

It is important to note that performing the stretches and exercises below correctly is crucial to making sure you don't do more harm than good when trying to heal your back pain. If you find an exercise below that you think will work for your type of back pain, try looking up videos of people performing these exercises before you attempt them so you can both read and see the exercise being performed before you attempt it. This will help you know for sure you are doing it right. Start out light and gradually move to the medium impact exercises and try not to overdo it. Taking your time and doing things right is the key to building strength, stamina, and finding relief.

Yoga for the Back

Yoga can be a great way to find relief from different types of back pain. Try low-impact yoga poses that work on strengthening the core and back muscles, as well as poses that address hip mobility. Don't push yourself too far with the poses. If you feel any pain or discomfort, discontinue the pose.



The yoga pose below helps you use your hips to build back support. This pose may be right for those seeking to gain hip mobility and those with extension dominant back pain:

1. Stand with your shoulders back and your neck straight. You should feel comfortable and stable.
2. Take several deep breaths.
3. Step back with your left foot and turn it 90 degrees, opening out your body.
4. With your legs straight, slowly bring your right hand toward the floor and raise your left arm above your head to enter a **Triangle Pose**.
5. Feel the gentle pull in your hamstrings and hold for a few breaths. Repeat this for the opposite side.

If lower back pain is what has you down, try the **child's pose**. Follow the steps below to perform this pose:

1. Start with your hands and knees. Center your breath, and begin to let your thoughts slow down. Turn your awareness inward.
2. Spread your knees wide apart while keeping your big toes touching. Rest your buttocks on your heels. If you have tight hips, you can keep your knees and thighs together.
3. Sit up straight and lengthen your spine up through the crown of your head.
4. As you exhale, bow forward, draping your torso between your thighs. Your heart and chest should rest between or on top of your thighs. Allow your forehead to come to the floor.
5. Keep your arms long and extended, palms facing down. Press back slightly with your hands to keep your buttocks in contact with your heels. Lengthen from your hips to your armpits, and then extend even further through your fingertips. For deeper relaxation, bring your arms back to rest alongside your thighs with your palms facing up. Completely relax your elbows.



6. Allow your upper back to broaden. Soften and relax your lower back. Allow all tension in your shoulders, arms, and neck to drain away.
7. Keep your gaze drawn inward with your eyes closed.
8. Hold for up to a minute or longer, breathing softly.
9. When you want to release the pose, gently use your hands to walk your torso upright to sit back on your heels.

The Thread the Needle Pose is another pose that can help to target back pain and provide relief. To perform this pose, follow the steps below:

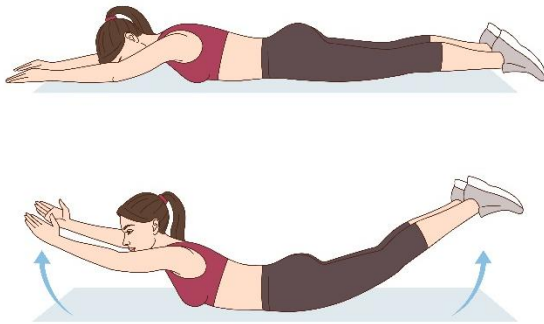
1. Start by lying on your back with your knees up, and your feet and shoulders touching the floor.
2. Place your right foot over your left thigh, and then reach your right hand through the triangular gap between your legs.



3. Reach around your left thigh with your left hand to clasp your fingers together, and slowly pull back so your knees are brought toward your chest.
4. Avoid straining or pulling too hard.
5. Take a few deep breaths and then relax your body. Repeat this with your other leg.

The Superman is a great yoga pose to help strengthen the core and the back. It is a great beginner pose as well. Follow the steps below to learn how to do this beneficial pose:

1. Start by lying on your stomach with your legs straight and your arms stretched over your head. Your elbows should be at your ears.
2. Activate your core muscles and slowly lift your arms and legs straight up into the air. Keep your knees and elbows straight as you do this. Posing this way makes you look like superman when he is flying!



3. Keep your neck in a neutral position so you are still looking down either at the ground or a few inches in front of you.
4. Hold this pose for ten seconds and then slowly bring your arms and legs back down. Repeat this up to five times and each time you repeat it, try holding a few seconds longer than before.

Strengthening the Core

For back pain associated with flexion dominant and extension dominant back pain, it is often recommended to perform core-strengthening exercises. The following exercises can help to build the core so you can experience back pain relief:

❖ Chair Crunch:

Start by lying on your back with your legs comfortably resting on a chair. Next, put your fingers behind your head and lift your chin up. Tighten your abdominal muscles and use these muscles to raise your shoulders from the floor. This action will cause your stomach to crunch together and contract the core muscles. Slowly lower your back to the starting position. Try to perform three sets of ten reps each, but if you have trouble, start with one set of ten reps and work your way to this.



❖ Kneeling Extension:

Begin by kneeling and placing your hands on the floor. Your hands should be under your shoulders and your knees directly under the hips. Next, tighten your core muscles, and gently raise your right arm while extending it forward.

Finally, raise your left leg and extend it outward. Your toes should be pointing in a downward direction. Try to maintain this pose for ten seconds and then gently return to the starting position. Repeat this three times on each side.

❖ The Plank:

This is a great exercise for strengthening the core, but it can be difficult if you have never attempted it. Don't feel like you have to hold the pose for the recommended ten seconds if you are having a hard time. Work your way up to ten seconds. Start by lying in a prone position with your face down on the floor.

Next, push your toes to the ground and your both elbows to the floor. Tighten your abdominal muscles firmly. Finally, lift-up your body off the ground. Keep your core muscles tight at all times and the bottom raised as high as your shoulders to avoid tension at the lower back.

Try to hold this position for ten seconds and then gently lower back to the starting position.



Repeat this five times each session or start with one time and build your way up to five.

Flexion Stretches to Strengthen the Hips and Pelvis

For extension dominant back pain, working on hip mobility is important. Other types of back pain focus on the hips and pelvis as well. Try the exercises below for better hip mobility and pelvic tilt:

❖ Supine Pelvic Tilt

1. Start by lying on the floor (using a mat is optimal) with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Extend your arms alongside your torso, palms facing down. The back

of your head should be touching the mat and your neck should be aligned with your spine. Allow your back to maintain a natural curve, leaving space between your low back and the mat. You should be able to slide your hand into this space.

2. Inhale slowly. As you exhale, try to engage your abdominal muscles, allowing that action to tilt your tailbone upward and close the space between your low back and the mat or floor. You'll feel a gentle stretch of your low back.
3. Inhale again slowly, allowing your spine and pelvis to return to the original position. Try to do five to ten reps daily.

❖ **Hip Flexor Stretch**

1. Start in a standing position. Step your left leg out in front of you and lunge until your right knee is resting on the ground. Place a towel under your knee if this pose is uncomfortable. Your left leg should make a 90-degree angle at your knee.
2. Next, bring your pelvis forward by tightening your gluteus and abdominal muscles.
3. Finally, lean forward from your right leg until you feel tension in the hip flexor and inner thigh of your right leg. Attempt to hold this for 30 seconds and repeat up to five times.
4. Switch legs and repeat.

Pelvic Anterior Tilt Exercises

Sometimes a pelvic anterior tilt can cause back pain or make it worse. The exercises below are especially helpful for back pain associated with neurogenic claudication and can help correct a pelvic anterior tilt:

❖ **Side Stretch**

1. Start by standing upright with your back stretched and your core engaged.
2. Bring your arms above your head and press your palms together. Take a deep breath.
3. Bend laterally at the hip and bring your upper body to the right side as you exhale.
4. Hold this pose for three to four breaths and then slowly return to the starting position.
5. Repeat this pose on the other side.

❖ **Pretzel Stretch**

1. Start by lying on one side with knees bent to hip height.
2. Throw your bottom leg back and hold the ankle with the arm closest to the ceiling. Use the other arm to grab the knee of the other leg.
3. Twist your torso toward the ceiling and hold your knee to the ground.

4. Exhale and twist deeper into the stretch. Hold the position for three or four breaths.
5. Repeat this with the other side.

Low Impact Functional Strength Training

Low impact strength training can help to relieve back pain and benefit the body in a variety of ways.

Some benefits of low impact strength training include reliving stress, helping joints, improving cardiovascular endurance, reducing the risk of diseases, improving cognition, developing kinesthetic awareness, and improving bone density.

The best part is in the name: low impact. These exercises are designed to be easy for all ages and capabilities. Below are some great low impact strength training exercises to try:

Dumbbell Exercises

Dumbbells can be an excellent tool when strength training. You can choose dumbbells that are right for you so you can benefit from the exercises below. Once you build strength, feel free to upgrade your dumbbells to a heavier weight.



❖ Chest Press

1. Start by lying on a flat bench. Your feet should be flat on the ground. Hold one dumbbell in each hand at your chest, your wrists above your elbows and close to your body.
2. Take a breath in, sucking into your belly. Then, push the dumbbells up until your arms are extended.
3. Lower the dumbbells in a controlled movement, back to your starting position.

❖ Hammer Curl

1. Begin by holding a dumbbell in each hand. Your hands should be by your side and your palms are each facing your body.
2. Using only your biceps, bend your arm at the elbow to bring your dumbbells to your chest. The end of the dumbbell should be pointed in the direction it is travelling.
3. Lower the weight back to starting position.

❖ Dumbbell Romanian Deadlift

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a dumbbell in each hand. Keep your knees slightly bent.
2. Next, hinge at the hips, lowering your dumbbells to the ground. Hold them horizontally with your palms facing your thighs. Keep them as close to your legs as possible as you bring them down.
3. Stop at your shins. Drive your heels into the ground and push your hips forward, but be careful not to overextend. Squeeze your glutes as you return to the starting position.



❖ Bent Over Row

1. Start by holding two dumbbells while standing up and start to reach down by slightly bending your knees.
2. Lift the dumbbells up while keeping the elbows close to the body, then return to the initial position after a short pause.
3. Do your best to keep your back straight while doing this. To help increase the movement, make sure you squeeze the back muscles as you reach the peak before you release.

More Functional Strength Training Exercises

No dumbbells? No problem! You can still perform back-strengthening exercises without the use of dumbbells. Below are some useful exercises to get you started:

❖ Pull-Up

Pull ups utilize your own body as the weight instead of dumbbells. They can be hard for some people, but with practice, you may be surprised at what you can do. Pull ups target multiple areas of the body and can strengthen the back, shoulders, triceps, biceps, forearms, fingers, and core.

Many people can't even do one pull up because they can be difficult due to lifting your own body weight and weakened arm muscles. Start with assisted pull ups if you can't do a pull up. Assisted pull ups involve a person there to help lift you as you pull yourself up to the bar. This will help gradually train the muscles involved to engage and strengthen.

Over time, your partner can help less and less until you are able to pull yourself up.

❖ Lunges

This classic exercise move is easy enough for just about anyone to do. It is perfect for those over 50 to practice to help strength the core and quads:

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and keep your hands on your hips.
2. Keeping your back upright and chest out, take a big step forward with one leg, aligning your front knee with your ankle.
3. Lower down into a lunge until both your front and back legs form 90-degree angles.
4. Drive through your front heel to stand back up and repeat this with the other leg
5. Do this three times daily.

❖ Sit Backs

For older adults who have issues with sitting down, standing up, or getting up from the bed, sit backs can work to train the core and back to help with this problem. Follow the steps below to learn how:

1. Sit on the floor or bed with your knees bent and your back straight. Cross your arms over your chest with your palms placed on the upper arms or shoulders. Do not over bend your knees, and keep your gaze situated straight ahead.
2. Taking care to use your abdominal muscles to do the bulk of the lifting, slowly lean back. Keep your feet on the ground in front of you, and only go as far as you are comfortable. Keep your back as straight as possible.
3. Return to your initial position and repeat the movement ten more times.

❖ Bird Dog

This exercise gets its name because when you do it right, you look like a bird dog pointing. The bird dog can help improve lower back mobility, while also strengthening the core and glutes. Follow the steps below:

1. Begin on your hands and knees, either on the floor or on the bed. Your hands should be positioned immediately underneath your shoulders, and your knees should be aligned with your hips.
2. Lift and extend one leg out behind you. Try to make your leg as straight as possible, but only lift and straighten as much as you feel comfortable and confident doing. Breathe in and tighten your core muscles as you do this. At the same time, lift your opposite arm out in front of you so that your palm is level with your shoulder.

3. Next, lower your leg and arm back down to their starting position as you breathe out through your mouth. Do the same exercise with the other leg and arm.
4. Complete this exercise ten times on each side about three to five times a week for best results. Remember to lift your leg using your abdominal muscles and not your back muscles to avoid hurting your back.



❖ Knees to Chest

This exercise is great for strengthening the hips and back. Although it is an exercise often recommended for seniors, it can be more advanced due to the amount of extension when bringing the knees to the chest. Take your time trying this exercise and only do what you are comfortable with.

1. Lie down flat (on your back) on the ground or on the bed. If you lie on the ground, use a yoga mat for comfort. You might need to have a pillow to support your head and a small pillow or blanket to support your lower back as you do this exercise.
2. Lift your right knee up toward your chest while keeping your left leg straight. Use your hands to grab your knee and pull it closer to your chest. Do not push yourself farther than you feel comfortable.
3. Hold your knee close to your chest for five seconds, then release and gently return your leg to its starting position. Repeat this exercise on the other leg and perform the knee-to-chest exercise a total of five times on each side.

NATURAL REMEDIES FOR BACK PAIN

If you have been to an allopathic doctor for back pain treatment, you might have heard them tell you to use NSAIDs to relieve the pain. This is a very common allopathic approach to back pain because NSAIDs like ibuprofen and naproxen temporarily relieve the pain while also reducing inflammation.

There are several issues with using these over-the-counter pills to relieve back pain on a regular basis: first, they only temporarily reduce the pain and inflammation. You will likely experience temporary relief and then go right back to being in pain.

This is because they actually mask the pain rather than treating the issue. Second, they can cause serious renal damage if you use them too often. The kidneys filter these drugs and over time, they take their toll. You don't have to live on these pills to get through the pain and inflammation that come with back pain. You have other options that don't come with the potentially deadly side effects.

In addition to exercise, using natural remedies to help relieve back pain can work wonders to reduce pain, inflammation, and nerve issues. One reason natural remedies are great for back pain is because instead of just covering up the pain, they help to target the root cause of the pain and work to correct this.

When you exercise in addition to taking natural remedies, you are targeting the root cause of your back pain and there is a good chance you will find relief much faster! You may even get to a place where you don't need the natural remedies daily or even weekly. The remedies below have been shown to target different kinds of back pain. Choose one that you think is right for your particular issues:

Mullein Root Tincture

Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) leaves and flowers have been used medicinally for a wide range of maladies. However, mullein root has its own unique healing properties. It works to tone, prevent spasms, and reduce inflammation in the back muscles. It is perfect for those who suffer with back spasms. Mullein is a very common herb and grows wild throughout most of the world.



It is easy to spot with its large, fuzzy leaves forming a basal rosette. Harvest the roots from an area you know is free from contaminants.

Chop the roots well and then fill a sterile glass jar with them. Completely cover the plant material with at least 80 proof alcohol and allow this to sit in a cool, dark place for four to six weeks. After this, strain out the liquid and bottle it in a dropper bottle. Take two droppers full up to four times daily as needed for back spasms and pain.

Sciatica Blend

Sciatica is a different type of back pain because it is caused by the sciatic nerve rather than muscles. This nerve extends from your lower back through your hips and buttocks and down each leg. Pain from sciatica radiates down this nerve, so people feel pain and numbness along the path of this nerve when they have sciatica. It is not uncommon to experience inflammation in the affected area as well.

Sometimes, sciatica is triggered by a disc, bone spur, or narrowing of the spine press on the nerve. It is possible to treat sciatica without surgery by exercising, seeing a chiropractor, practicing good posture, and using herbal remedies like the one below to soothe the nerves and reduce inflammation. A blend of St. John's Wort, valerian, and ginger merge to create this back pain remedy for sciatica.

St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is known for its ability to calm the nerves. It has been utilized for mild to moderate depression, but also works for treating shooting nerve pain. It is a powerful nervine that can keep the sciatic nerve in check.



Figure 1. St. John's Wort



Figure 2. Valerian

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) is another strong nervine and sedative herb that helps relieve pain and calms the nervous system. It is a mild Central Nervous System (CNS) depressant, so it can be very effective at treating sciatica when the nerve is overactive.

Ginger is great for treating pain and inflammation and works well with St. John's wort and valerian to soothe the nerve pain. Combine one part St. John's wort flowers (fresh or wilted), one part chopped valerian root, and one part chopped ginger root in a sterile glass jar and then completely cover this in at least 80 proof alcohol to make a tincture. Let this sit in a cool, dark place for four to six weeks and

then strain it out and bottle it in a dropper bottle. Take two droppers full up to three times daily as needed for sciatica.

Tension Blend



Skullcap

If muscle tension is the cause of your back pain, you need something that will help promote relaxation and soothe tense muscles in the body.

Many people experience tension and don't even realize they are as tense as they are. Tension is often caused by two culprits: stress and anxiety. These things wreak havoc on the body if they are not addressed, and back pain is just one way they manifest themselves.

You can create a tension-busting remedy to help loosen tense muscles and relieve the anxiety that causes them by making a tincture with Lavender and Skullcap.

Lavender has been shown over and over in studies to help relieve stress and anxiety while promoting peace and calm in both the body and mind. Skullcap is a powerful nervine herb that helps to relieve tension and provide soothing support. Fill a jar with one part dried and chopped skullcap and one part lavender.

Next, completely cover the plant material with at least 80 proof alcohol and let this sit in a cool, dark place for four to six weeks. After the four to six weeks is up, strain out the liquid and bottle it in a dropper bottle. Take two to three droppers full up to three times daily for help with stress and anxiety that causes muscle tension. For additional pain relief, try booking an appointment with a licensed massage therapist to help with sore back muscles.

Anti-Inflammatory Blend

Inflammation is often the cause of pain, no matter what type of pain it is. Pain and inflammation go hand-in-hand. When you are able to control inflammation, you might be able to control pain as well.

This remedy works to target back pain caused by inflammation. It combines turmeric and black pepper to create an anti-inflammatory powerhouse. Black pepper works great with turmeric because it contains compounds that help the body absorb the curcumin in the turmeric better.

Fill a jar with chopped turmeric and then add two to three tablespoons of black peppercorns. Completely cover this in at least 80 proof alcohol and allow this to sit in a cool, dark place to infuse for four to six weeks. When the four to six weeks are up, strain out the jar and bottle the liquid in a dropper bottle. Take two droppers full up to four times daily as needed for back pain triggered by inflammation.



Turmeric

Willow Bark NSAID Replacement



Willow

The side effects of daily NSAID use have already been discussed. Even though these over-the-counter pain pills are often advised for back pain, they are definitely not a wise long-term solution for back pain.

If you have been looking for something that does what NSAIDs do without the side effects, you may be surprised to learn that white willow bark can help.

Many willow species contain a compound called salicin. This compound is used to create Aspirin in labs.

The difference between salicin from the white willow and the salicin that is converted in a lab to create Aspirin is that there are far less side effects when using the naturally sourced salicin from white willow (*Salix alba*).

You can create a natural NSAID tincture from white willow bark by filing a jar with the shaved inner bark from the white willow tree. Cover the shavings in 80 proof alcohol and allow this to infuse for four to six weeks.

When it is ready, strain it out and bottle it in a dropper bottle. Take fifteen to twenty drops under the tongue up to three times daily.

Warming Muscle Rub

Sometimes a warming sensation is just what you need to find relief from back pain. A heat pad or hot bath are two ways to help bring relief, but you can also create a muscle rub that generates heat and helps target pain at the same time.

Cayenne peppers are the main ingredient this blend. They contain a compound called capsaicin that works to block pain.

In addition, cayenne can heat the area it is applied to, which helps to provide almost instant relief. The addition of ginger to this recipe can create a powerfully anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving salve.



Cayenne pepper

To make this salve, melt one ounce of beeswax in a double boiler and then add eight ounces of the carrier oil of your choice. Some good options include olive oil or coconut oil. Next, add one tablespoon each of cayenne and ginger powder. Blend this together well and then pour the mixture into tins or jars to cool. Apply as needed for pain.

Wash your hands frequently while making this salve and using it because if you were to touch your eyes it could cause burning or irritation. Also, avoid applying this salve to broken skin.

Cooling Muscle Rub

If a cooling sensation helps you find relief from back pain, this is the salve for you! Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) is a popular plant for muscle rubs because it provides a strong cooling sensation and has pain-relieving properties.



Figure 1. Wintergreen



Figure 2. Peppermint

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) and eucalyptus also help to relieve pain and cool the skin. Combining these in a muscle rub salve is the perfect remedy for targeting back pain. Upon application, you might notice a gentle tingling sensation, which is normal when using the essential oils of these plants. Before applying any salve topically, perform a patch test by massaging a small amount into the skin on the forearm. Let this sit for 24 hours before applying larger amount of a salve to your body.

To make this salve, melt one ounce of beeswax in a double boiler and then add eight ounces of the carrier oil of your choice. Next, remove the double boiler from heat and add eight drops of wintergreen essential oil, ten drops of peppermint essential oil, and ten drops of eucalyptus essential oil.

Blend all this together well and then pour it into tins or jars to cool. Apply as often as needed to painful or sore back muscles. Avoid getting this on broken skin/open wounds, as it may cause irritation.

Analgesic Muscle Rub

Certain plants are known for relieving pain by targeting inflammation, nerves, and pain receptors. Arnica is one such plant. Arnica flowers can be infused into a carrier oil to create an arnica-infused oil to use as a base for this recipe.

Fill a sterile glass jar with dried arnica flowers and then completely cover them in a carrier oil (hemp seed oil is recommended). Allow this to sit and infuse for four to six weeks before straining out the oil. If you don't want to wait that long, you can infuse the flowers in the oil in a day by sitting the jar in a pan of hot water on the stovetop (using the warm setting or on low) and letting this infuse for up to twelve hours before straining it out.

You'll need eight ounces of arnica-infused oil for this recipe. Next, melt one ounce of beeswax in a double boiler and then add the arnica oil. Remove the oils from heat and add ten drops of rosemary essential oil and eight drops of black pepper essential oil.

Blend this together well and then pour it into tins or jars to cool. Massage into sore muscles or painful areas as needed for pain relief. Avoid getting any in open wounds.

Trauma Oil

Trauma oil is an oil infusion that has been used traditionally to target painful, swollen areas that are caused by some sort of trauma. This oil blend is often used to treat sprains, arthritic joints, contusions, and other injured areas of the body.



Calendula

There are three herbs that are used to make traditional trauma oil: calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), St. John's wort, and arnica. Each of these herbs helps lower inflammation, soothe the area, and help promote healing.

If you are suffering from back pain as a result of trauma to the area or an injury of some sort, this may help provide relief. Fill a jar with one part calendula flowers, one part St. John's Wort flowers, and one part arnica flowers.

Next, completely cover the plant material in a carrier oil. Olive oil or hemp seed oil is recommended. Allow this to sit in a dark place to infuse for four to six weeks or sit the jar on the stove in a pan of hot water for up to twelve hours to infuse.

Finally, strain out the oil and bottle it. Apply a liberal amount to sore or swollen areas as often as needed. Take time to massage the oil into the area well to help it absorb. Avoid getting it into open wounds.

OTHER STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING BACK PAIN

Establishing a good exercise routine, reaching a healthy weight, and using natural remedies will go far in helping you find relief from back pain. However, there are other steps you can take to ensure you are doing everything you can to eliminate back pain triggers. Below are other strategies you can employ to help manage back pain and inflammation in your body:

Posture and Form

A great many people have terrible posture that triggers body pain and they don't even realize they are doing anything wrong. Posture is crucial to healthy muscles, joint function, and a healthy spine. When is the last time you thought about your posture? Set a reminder on your phone to check your posture at different times throughout the day.

When the reminder goes off, do a thorough self-assessment. How were you standing or sitting just then? Is this the way you stand/sit/move all the time when you are performing this task? Is it the correct way? If you are wondering what correct posture looks like, here is a helpful guide:

❖ Sitting Properly:

When sitting, make sure that your feet are on the floor or on a footrest rather than hanging mid-air. Keep your knees at or below your hip level and maintain relaxed shoulders with your forearms at a parallel position to the ground. Have a backrest supporting your entire back.

❖ Standing Properly:

Make sure that your weight is borne by the soles of your feet, with your feet placed four to five inches apart. Tuck your stomach in and have your hands hanging naturally from the body sides. Maintain a straight and tall structure.

❖ Lying Down:

Lie on your back or sides however you feel most comfortable. Support your head with a pillow that allows your head to be in a slightly elevated position. Avoid lying on your stomach. A comfortable and supportive mattress is essential to overall health, so it is definitely worth the investment. A good mattress isn't just for good posture. It can promote more restful sleep.

Form

Just as posture is essential when sitting, standing, and lying down, form is essential for when you are performing different tasks, such as walking, running, lifting objects, or exercising. Failure to follow proper form can be just as damaging to the back and spine as bad posture. Good form goes a long way in preventing and relieving back pain. Below are some helpful tips for proper form when walking, running, and lifting.

❖ Proper Walking Form

Walking is a great way to get exercise and fresh air. It can help you maintain a healthy weight while also strengthening your legs and core. If you enjoy a daily walk, make sure you have the right form. Below are steps to walking with the proper form:

1. Start by standing up straight with your feet together a comfortable space apart. Your toes should be pointed forward.
2. Picture an imaginary string attached to the top of your head. Feel it lift you up from your hips so you are tall and straight. Do not lean forward or backward.
3. Avoid arching your back.
4. Suck in your stomach slightly, engaging your core. This will help maintain proper posture while walking.
5. Maintain a neutral pelvis, not tipping your hips forward or back, to allow for your spine's natural curves.
6. Focus your eyes ahead of you. Your head will follow where your eyes are looking, so it will stay up straight and not bent down too much.
7. Keep your chin parallel to the ground. You will likely have corrected this by looking ahead of you, but take a moment to check that your chin isn't tilted either up or down. Walking with your head down (yes, this includes checking your phone) creates tension in your upper body and puts a strain on your neck, as does craning your neck backward.
8. Shrug your shoulders and let them relax, with your shoulders slightly back. This will help relieve the tension so many people carry in their shoulders.



❖ Proper Running Form

Running has exploded in popularity over the years, and for good reason! Daily running has been shown to improve cholesterol levels, boost the immune system, reduce chances of developing blood clots, and lower anxiety.

However, there is a proper way to maintain form while running. Make sure you have proper running form by following the steps below:

1. When running, make sure your body is upright. Avoid bending forward from the waist when you are running, as this can make it more difficult to lift the knee for an effective stride.
2. Don't keep your hands clenched in fists when you run. This expends extra energy you need for other things and overtightens the upper body.
3. Keep elbows bent at a 90 degree angle and avoid upper body rotation.
4. Always look ahead at the horizon when you are running.
5. Lean from your ankles when running rather than leaning back. This allows you to better conserve energy and propel your body forward. Pushing forward from the balls of your feet help you get a better ankle lean.
6. Pay attention to your cadence. Aim for 160 steps a minute if possible. You can monitor this with a fitness watch or your phone.

❖ Proper Lifting Form

If you have a bad back, lifting is definitely something you need to take seriously. Many people have gotten themselves into a mess when attempting to lift an object because they do not use proper form. Improper lifting form can make back pain much worse, increase inflammation, slip a disc, or result in a more serious injury.

Below is the proper way to lift an object if you find yourself in a situation where you have to lift something:

1. Always warm up the body and stretch before lifting.
2. Place your feet firmly on the ground, shoulder-width apart in front of the object.
3. Bend with your knees and never at the waist.
4. Always keep your back straight while lifting.
5. Lift with your leg muscles and not your back.
6. Lift the object close to your body and tighten your core muscles for stability.
7. Keep your eyes up while lifting to help you maintain better posture.

Breaking Bad Habits

It helps to do an assessment of how you are living your life to make sure there aren't any bad habits you need to work on or things you could be doing better in order to manage back pain. Posture is a big one, and has already been addressed. But how do you correct other bad habits you may not even know about?

Below are some bad habits many people have that greatly affect their back pain, as well as their overall health. Once you are aware of the habit, you can then attempt to break it:

❖ Sitting for long periods

This is a very common cause of back pain. Sitting for long periods of time puts additional pressure on the discs in the back. These discs are not able to perform properly because they are being compressed together as a person sits for long periods. This creates a lot of extra tension in the back, especially the lower back.

What can you do to correct this? There are a great many of us who have to work all day in an office while sitting down. You can take steps to reduce strain on the discs by setting a timer to go off every half hour so you can get up and stretch or take a walk. You don't have to wait thirty minutes either.

You can get up every ten to fifteen just to do some simple stretches if you want. This will almost certainly make a difference in how you feel each day. Another option for addressing this issue is to take a closer look at your office chair. Does your chair offer good lumbar support? It may be time to invest in a better chair or cushions that better support your hips and back.

❖ Shoes

Many of us, especially women, tend to wear the wrong shoes when it comes to supportive shoes for back health. Did you know that heels over one inch tall create extra pressure in the back and change the curvature of the spine? This forces a person to arch their back, which leads to a worsening of back pain because the muscles have to work harder. Heels that are too high cause pain throughout the body, not just in the back. They can trigger pain in the neck as well.

Just as shoes with high heels are bad for the back, shoes that are too flat can also be bad for the back. The perfect shoes help provide support and allow the spine to maintain a comfortable position. They need to have good, thick, comfortable insoles.

❖ Cigarettes/Smoking

We all know by now that smoking is not good for our health, but it can also affect spine tissue and lead to degeneration. The nicotine in cigarettes blocks oxygen and other nutrients from getting to the spinal discs. This in turn causes degenerative disc disease that leads to constant of back pain. Do what you can to stop smoking now and your body will thank you!

❖ Diet

It has already been mentioned that weight plays a significant role in many types of back pain. Part of this is diet. The spine and other tissues in the back need nutrients to function properly. When a person does not follow a healthy diet, the muscles, ligaments, tendons, and circulatory system do not receive what they need to function optimally. This can lead to inflammation, weight gain, stress, and chronic fatigue, in addition to worsening back pain.

Make sure you are eating a healthy diet that consists of whole foods, fruits, vegetables, and lean meats. Avoid processed foods and cooking oils, as well as fried foods. Sugar is highly inflammatory and can make back pain much worse. Do what you can to limit your sugar intake. Drink plenty of water to keep your discs lubricated. Avoid alcohol as well, as it can lead to additional inflammation.

❖ Twisting Movements

What you do each day plays a significant role in back pain management. If your job requires you to do a lot of lifting or twisting, you need to pay attention to how you are doing this to make sure you are using the correct form (see posture and form above). In addition, try wearing a back brace. When you twist your spine doing certain motions over and over, this can cause neck and lower back pain due to the strain it puts on the areas.

Stress and Anxiety

Constant stress and anxiety cause the body to produce more of a hormone called cortisol. This hormone is linked to all kinds of issues, ranging from weight gain to inflammation. This is one of many reasons why stress and anxiety cause back pain.

Find ways to manage stress in your life, such as daily exercise, self-care, finding a hobby, or using herbal remedies. Make sure you are getting enough sleep as well.

Some great herbal remedies to help with stress include:

❖ Lavender and Chamomile Tea



Chamomile

For a gentle and relaxing treat, try a daily cup of lavender and chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*) tea. Both of these herbs are known for their ability to calm and relax the body and mind. Infuse one teaspoon of each herb in one cup of hot water for ten to fifteen minutes. Add a bit of raw honey to taste and enjoy this daily when you need some de-stressing.

❖ Hops



Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) are a gentle stress reliever as well. In addition, they can help get you to sleep so you get the sleep you need to stay healthy.

Fill a glass jar with fresh or dried hops and then completely cover the plant material in at least 80 proof alcohol. Let this sit in a cool, dark place for four to six weeks before straining out the liquid. Once you strain out the liquid, bottle it in a dropper bottle.

Take two droppers full up to three times daily as needed for stress, anxiety, or trouble sleeping.

❖ Motherwort



Motherwort is great for those times when you are feeling overwhelmed. If you have too much going on at work or in life, it can offer the support you need to get through the stress. Motherwort is also great for the cardiovascular system and those who suffer from heart and blood pressure issues.

You can enjoy motherwort in tea by infusing two teaspoons in a cup of hot water for ten minutes or you can tincture motherwort by filling a jar with the herb and covering this in alcohol for four to six weeks. Strain it out and bottle it in a dropper bottle.

Take five to fifteen drops in a glass of water as needed for stress.

❖ Adaptogens

Adaptogens have already been mentioned for their ability to help the body deal with stress while also supporting the immune system. This goes for all kinds of stress, both physical and mental.

Adaptogenic herbs are perfect for daily use to help the body handle any stress that comes its way. One of the best adaptogenic herbs for stress management is ashwagandha. You can make a tincture with it by filling a jar with the chopped root and then covering that with 80 proof alcohol. Strain this out after four to six weeks and bottle it in a dropper bottle.

Take two droppers full up to three times daily for stress management.

Overdoing it – Know Your Limits

As we age, it can get harder to know when to quit. For some of us, as our body ages, it still feels like our minds are young. When certain tasks that seem like they would be easy become harder, some people still feel the need to carry on as usual, but this doesn't bode well for the back. Listen to your body.

Look for signs that something you are doing may not feel right, especially when it comes to lifting heavy objects or using improper lifting form because you are in a hurry. You may have been able to carry in a huge load of wood to put in the stove ten years ago, but perhaps today you feel a stiffness and soreness in your back when you do those things.

This doesn't mean you have to stop carrying wood, but perhaps modify the way you do it and the amount you carry.

Learning to make modifications as needed can save you a lot of pain and suffering down the road. If you ever run into a time when you may have overdone it and harmed your back, there are some things to watch for to know if you need to seek medical help right away:

❖ Sharp Pain

If you start to feel a sharp, stabbing pain, this could mean you tore a muscle or ligament. If the pain is sharp and not a dull ache, see a doctor right away to rule out tears or damage to organs.

❖ Radiating Pain

If you suddenly notice pain that radiates to the glutes or legs, this could mean you have a nerve issue that needs addressed immediately.

❖ Numbness or Tingling

The onset of tingling or a “pins and needles” feeling in the groin or glutes can be an indicator of an issue that needs treated right away. It is called saddle anesthesia and can be a sign of a serious nerve or spine problem.

❖ Incontinence

Loss of bladder (or bowel) control is a reason to get medical help right away. This might be a sign of a spine infection or nerve compression.

❖ Sudden Weakness in Legs

This is not something to take lightly. If you notice sudden weakness in the legs, you might have nerve compression or something more serious like a stroke.

❖ There is Hope for Relief

No matter what kind of back pain you have or the cause, know that there is hope. With the protocols in this book, you have a chance to utilize a variety of methods to ensure you can live life to the fullest! Remember that you don’t just have to practice one protocol. Employing multiple protocols in your life can lead to an even greater chance of relief.

Try a combination of exercise, diet, herbal remedies, and lifestyle changes to see just how much better you will feel over time.