



From time to time, almost everyone suffers from lower back problems. By staying active—and by strengthening and stretching the muscles in your body—you can avoid common back problems and back pain. If you are already suffering from lower back problems, doing the exercises presented here may help you feel better and may help prevent most back pain from recurring.

The basic types of exercises that can help your back include:

1. General physical activity
2. Strengthening exercises
3. Stretching exercises

Keep this sheet nearby. These exercises only take a few minutes each day and can help you prevent back pain. They can also help you recover from back problems.

Use caution

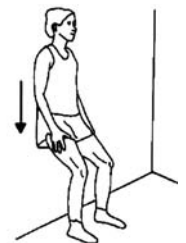
- These exercises are not recommended for use during a spasm or during the first one to three days of an injury or flare-up of back pain. Instead, see “First Aid: Back Problems” in your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- If any exercise causes increased or continuing back pain, stop the exercise and try something else. Stop any exercise that causes the pain to radiate away from your spine into your buttocks or legs, either during or after the exercise.
- You do not need to do every exercise. Stick with the ones that help you the most, or do only the exercises your medical team recommends.
- If you have just had a heart attack or if you have any other heart problem, make sure that you receive guidance before beginning or re-starting your physical activity program. If you have new or changing patterns of chest pain or discomfort, stop your physical activity and contact your doctor or other medical professional.

Strengthening exercise

□ Wall slides

This exercise strengthens the muscles that support the back. Strong back muscles help you lift better with your legs.

- Stand with your back against the wall and your feet about one foot away from the wall and shoulder width apart.
- Do a pelvic tilt to find your neutral spine position.
- Slowly bend your knees sliding your back down the wall several inches.
- Hold this position.



General physical activity

General physical activity—where the entire body is moving—can strengthen your body, improve your overall health, and can prevent most back pain. For example, activities such as swimming or walking can be very beneficial. Even small amounts of physical activity can make a difference. The goal for most people is to get 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. This means that it doesn't have to happen all at once. Even 10 minutes of exercise can help—as long as the sessions add up to 30 to 60 minutes for each day.

Here's a good way to measure if you are exercising at the right pace: First, you should be able to talk comfortably while you are exercising. If you are gasping for breath, you'll want to slow down. Here's another way to assess your exertion level: On a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 means “no work” and 10 means “unable to continue”), try to exercise between a 4 and a 6. Gradually increase how long, how often, and how hard you exercise.

Remember: The idea is to gradually improve over time, so start slowly, but try to improve as you grow stronger.

Stretching exercises

❑ Pelvic tilt

This exercise gently moves the spine and stretches the lower back muscles.

- Lie on your back, tucking in your abdomen so that your pelvis rocks and your lower back moves towards the floor.
- Move your pelvis in the other direction so that your back moves away from the floor.
- Count: 1 as you bring your back toward the floor, 2 to neutral, 3 back away from the floor, and 4 to neutral.



❑ Hamstring exercise

This exercise stretches the muscles in the back of your thigh. These muscles allow you to bend your legs.

- Lie on your back, keeping a natural curve in your back.
- Wrap a towel around one thigh just above the knee.
- Hold the ends of the towel in both hands.
- Using the towel, pull your thigh toward your chest.
- Keeping your thigh in this position, slowly straighten out your leg.
- Feel the stretch in the back of your thigh and leg.



❑ Single knee to chest

This exercise stretches the muscles in the back and will help keep your back flexible.

- Lie on your back and bring one knee toward your chest.
- Hold onto the knee with both hands.
- Slowly bring the knee closer to your chest.
- Feel the stretch in your buttock or your back.



❑ Hip flexor stretch

This exercise stretches the muscles in the front of your hip. The exercise can help you avoid “swayback,” caused by tight hip muscles.

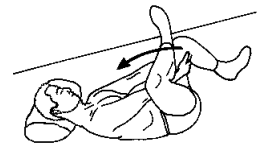
- Position yourself with one foot in front and the other foot in back about 1 to 2 feet.
- Perform a pelvic tilt by tucking your abdomen in and squeezing your buttocks together.
- Holding the pelvic tilt, bring your trunk upright and move your trunk toward the wall.
- Feel the stretch in the front of the thigh that is positioned behind you.



❑ Hip rotator stretch

This exercise stretches the muscles around your hip. Strong hip muscles allow you to squat down and lift better with your legs.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Lift one leg and place your ankle on the opposite knee.
- With both hands, grasp the thigh of the leg that is not crossed behind the knee. Gently pull your leg toward your chest. Feel the stretch in you buttock.
- Hold without bouncing for 20 to 40 seconds; then switch sides.
- If it is difficult for you to hold your thigh, place a rolled towel behind your knee and grasp both ends of the towel.



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.