

# Exercises for back pain relief

It is essential that you consult me (Monte) on 9960 6166 or your health professional before commencing these exercises. Robin McKenzie has written an easy to follow guide called "Treat your own back" and invented the following exercises.

## Exercise One

Lying Face Down Lie face down with your arms beside your body and your head turned to one side

Stay in this position, take a few deep breaths and then relax completely for four to five minutes.

You must make a conscious effort to remove all tension from the muscles in your lower back; without COMPLETE RELAXATION there is NO CHANCE of ELIMINATING any DISTORTION that may be present in the joint.

This exercise is used mainly in the treatment of acute back pain that is pain that is short-lived and is one of the First Aid exercises.

It should be done once at the BEGINNING of EACH exercise session, and the sessions are to be spread evenly six to eight times throughout the day.

This means that you should repeat the sessions about every two hours.

In addition, you must lie face down whenever you are resting.

When in acute pain you should avoid sitting, at least during the first few days.

## Exercise Two

Lying Face Down in Extension Remain face down. Place your elbows under your shoulders so that you lean on your forearms. During this exercise you should commence taking in a few deep breaths and allow the muscles in the lower back to relax completely. Again you should stay in this position for about five minutes.

You must make a conscious effort to remove all tension from the muscles in your lower back; without COMPLETE RELAXATION there is NO CHANCE of ELIMINATING any DISTORTION that may be present in the joint.

This exercise is used mainly in the treatment of severe low back pain and is one of the First Aid exercises it should always follow exercise one and is to be performed once per session.

Should you experience severe and increasing pain on attempting this exercise, there are certain measures to be taken before you can continue exercising, these are discussed in the section 'No response or benefit'

## Exercise Three

Extension in Lying Remain face down. Place your elbows under your shoulders in the press-up position. Now you are ready to start exercise 3.

Straighten your elbows and push the top half of your body up as far as the pain permits. It is important that you completely relax the pelvis, hips and legs as you do this. Keep your pelvis, hips and legs hanging limp and allow your back to sag. Once you have maintained this position for a second or two, you should lower yourself to the starting position. Each time you repeat this movement cycle you must try to raise your upper body a little higher, so that in the end your back is extended as much as possible with your arms as straight as possible.

Once your arms are straight, remember to hold the sag for a second or two as this is a most important part of the exercise. The sag may be maintained for longer than one or two seconds if you feel the pain reducing or centralising.

This is the most useful and effective first aid procedure in the treatment of acute low back pain. The exercise can also be used to treat stiffness of the low back, and to PREVENT low back pain RECURRING once you are fully recovered. When used in the treatment of either pain or stiffness, the exercise should be performed ten times per session and the sessions are to be spread evenly six to eight times throughout the day.

Should you not respond or have increasing pain on attempting this exercise exercise, there are certain measures to be taken before you can continue exercising, these are discussed in the section 'No response or benefit' read it now.

#### **Exercise Four**

Extension in Standing Stand upright with your feet slightly apart. Place your hands in the small of your back with your fingers pointing backwards and your thumbs pointing forwards.

You are now ready to start Exercise Four

Bend your trunk backwards at the waist as far as you can, using your hands as a fulcrum. It is important that you keep your knees straight as you do this. Once you have maintained this position for a second or two you should return to the starting position. Each time you repeat this movement cycle, you should try to bend backwards a little further so that in the end you have reached the maximum possible degree of extension.

When you are in acute pain, this exercise may replace exercise 3 should circumstances prevent you from exercising in the lying position. This exercise, however is not as effective as exercise 3.

Once you have fully recovered and no longer have low back pain, this exercise is your MAIN TOOL in the PREVENTION of further BACK PROBLEMS

As a preventive measure, repeat the exercise every once in a while whenever you find yourself working in a forward bent position. Perform the exercise BEFORE the pain appears.

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#### **Exercise Five**

Flexion in Lying Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor or bed.

You are now ready to start Exercise Five

Bring both knees up towards the chest. Place both hands around your knees and gently but firmly pull the knees as close to the chest as the pain permits. Once you have maintained this position for a second or two you should lower the legs and return to the starting position. It is important that you DO NOT RAISE YOUR HEAD as you perform this exercise, or STRAIGHTEN YOUR LEGS AS YOU LOWER THEM. Each time you repeat this movement cycle, you should try to pull your knees a little further so that in the end you have reached the maximum possible degree of flexion. At this stage your knees may touch the chest.

This exercise is used in the treatment of stiffness in the low back which may have developed since your injury or pain began. While damaged tissues may have now healed, they may have also shortened and become less flexible; it is now necessary to restore their elasticity and full function by performing flexion exercises. These exercises should be commenced with caution. In the beginning you must only do five or six per session, and the sessions are to be repeated three or four times per day.

As you have probably realised, this exercise eliminates the lordosis once the knees are bent to the chest, so in order to rectify any distortion that may result, FLEXION EXERCISES MUST ALWAYS BE FOLLOWED BY A SESSION OF EXERCISE 3 - EXTENSION IN LYING.

You may stop performing Exercise 4 when you can readily pull the knees to the chest without producing tightness or pain.

You may then progress to Exercise 6

#### **Exercise Six**

Flexion in Sitting Sit on the edge of a steady chair with your knees and feet well apart and let your hands rest between your legs.

You are now ready to start Exercise 6

Bend your trunk forwards and touch the floor with your hands. Return immediately to the starting position. Each time you repeat this movement cycle you must bend down a little further so that end you have reached the maximum possible degree of flexion. At this reached the maximum possible degree of flexion and your head is as close as possible to the floor. The exercise can be made more effective by holding on

to your ankles with your hands and pulling yourself down further.

Exercise 6 SHOULD ONLY BE COMMENCED AFTER THE COMPLETION OF ONE WEEK OF EXERCISE 5, WHETHER EXERCISE 5 HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL OR NOT IN REDUCING YOUR STIFFNESS OR PAIN. In the beginning you must only do five or six repetitions per session and the sessions are to be repeated three or four times per day.

FLEXION EXERCISES MUST ALWAYS BE FOLLOWED BY A SESSION OF EXERCISE 3 - EXTENSION IN LYING.

### **No Response or Benefit**

After exercising without any relief or benefit for three or four days, you may conclude that the exercises as performed are ineffectual. There are two main causes for lack of response or benefit from these exercises. A lack of response to these exercises is possible in some people when their pain is felt only to one side of the spine, or is felt much more to one side than the other. If your pain during the course of the day is felt only to one side, more to one side as you perform Exercises 1,2,3 you may need to modify your body position before commencing them. To achieve this modification, you should:

1. Adopt a position to perform Exercise 1 and allow yourself to relax for a few minutes.

2. Remain face down and now shift your hips AWAY from the PAINFUL side; that is if your pain is usually more on the right side you must move your hips three or four inches to the left, and once more completely relax for a few minutes.

3. While allowing the hips to remain off-centre, lean on the elbows as described in exercise two and relax for a further three or four minutes.

You are now ready to commence Exercise 3.

With the hips still off-centre, complete one session of Exercise 3 and relax once more.

You may need to repeat the exercise several times but before commencing each session of ten you should ensure that the hips are still off centre; remember, away from the painful side.

Even with your hips in the off-centre position, you should try with each repetition to move higher and higher.

You should reach the maximum amount of extension possible at which time the arms should be completely straight.

For the next three or four days you should continue to perform Exercises 1,2,3 from the modified starting position.

After a few days of practice you may notice that the pain is distributed more evenly across the back or may have centralised. Once this occurs you may stop shifting the hips before exercising and continue exercising as described earlier.

Occasionally shifting the hips away from the painful side is sufficient to stop the pain completely.

The second cause for lack of response to the exercise arises when Exercise 3 is performed without adequate fixation.

Exercise 3 occasionally gives benefit for a few hours only and then the pain returns. The effectiveness of Exercise 3 can be improved by holding the pelvis down using the hands of another person, or by constructing a simple device which can be improvised at home using an ironing board with a seat belt or strong leather strap placed firmly around the waistline. This added fixation frequently makes the difference between the success or failure of the exercise.

## **RECURRENCE**

Irrespective of what you are doing or where you are, at the first sign of recurrence of low back pain you should immediately start the exercises which previously led to recovery and follow the instructions to relieve acute pain.

You should at once commence Exercise 4 - Extension in Standing.  
If this does not abolish your pain within minutes, you must quickly introduce

Exercise 3 - Extension in Lying.

The immediate performance of Exercise 3 can so often prevent the onset of a disabling attack. If your pain is already too severe to tolerate these exercises, you should commence Exercises 1 and 2 - Lying face down and lying down in extension.

Finally, if you have on sided symptoms which do not centralise with the exercises recommended so far, you should shift your hips away from the painful side before commencing the exercises and hold your hips in the off-centre position while you exercise.

In addition to the exercises, you must pay extra attention to your posture and maintain the Lordosis as much as possible.

If this episode of low back pain seems to be different from previous occasions and if your pain persists despite the fact that you closely follow the instructions, you should seek advice.