

Choosing the right exercise

If you are suffering from an episode of acute back pain, start with the appropriate exercises in the left hand column as soon as you can move without too much pain – probably about a day after the attack began. Progress to the exercises in the middle column when the severe pain has subsided. The exercises in the third column are for stretching and strengthening, to help you to avoid back trouble.

Condition	During acute attack	After severe pain	Prevention
Acute lumbar pain (caused by disc syndrome)	Pelvic tilt Passive extension* Mountain and sag	Passive extension* Standing extension Low back stretch* Side gliding Gentle rotation Side bending	Hamstring stretches Abdominal exercises Leg exercises
Acute wry neck (caused by disc or facet joint)	Passive extension*	Retraction and lengthening Passive extension	
Acute pain in the leg	Pelvic tilt Passive extension*	Passive extension* Low back stretch* Gentle twisting	Hamstring stretches Abdominal exercises Leg exercises
Lumbar instability	Pelvic tilt	Passive extension* Low back stretch Stabilizing exercises	Abdominal exercises Leg exercises Back strengthening
Facet joint disease	Pelvic tilt	Low back stretch	Abdominal exercises Standing pelvic tilt
Strained muscles		Gentle rotation Side bending Low back stretch	
Tense muscles	Low back stretch Gentle rotation Side bending Leg muscle stretches Neck stretches		
Trigger points	Specific exercises to stretch the affected muscles		

*If your pain increases after six repetitions, do not continue the exercise

Therapeutic exercises for lower backs

These may help acute pain in the lower back or sciatica. Always follow your physiotherapist's or doctor's advice about exercising your back. But if you have recurrent attacks and are familiar with the exercises, or if you feel that your attack is not

sufficiently severe to warrant a consultation, then it may be worth trying any of the following exercises. Begin the exercises about a day after the pain first started, but stop at once if the pain increases or spreads away from your spine.

Pelvic tilt

This helps most types of acute lumbar pain by relieving pressure on the facet joints and gently stretching the muscles and ligaments of the back. It strengthens the abdominal muscles that indirectly support the spine. If practised regularly, it encourages better posture. Do it on the floor at first, but later try it standing up. If it's easier, support your legs on cushions in the Fowler position (*see p. 66*).

1 Lie on the floor with your arms at your sides, your feet flat on the floor and your legs bent at a comfortable angle.



2 Gently press the small of your back against the floor and tilt your pubic bone upwards by tightening your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. Hold for at least six seconds, then relax slowly. Repeat up to ten times.



Passive extension

This helps many kinds of backache brought on by sitting. Don't try it if it increases your pain. If bending backwards or staying upright is difficult because you are already stuck in a stooped position, lower yourself slowly until you are lying face down and relax for a few minutes before you start. Try the exercise two or three times initially.

1 Lie face down with your hands flat on the floor and level with your shoulders as if you were about to do a press-up.



2 Push up with your arms, leaving your hips on the floor. Lift your head and shoulders as high as you can. Let your back sag in. Breathe out, then slowly lower your trunk, using your arm muscles only. Repeat up to ten times.

Let your spine arch progressively more with each repetition

