

Oh My Aching Back!

consideration and the right exercise can help

Sometimes it creeps up, at others it's a case of: "Ouch! My back's just gone." Back pain is a common occurrence and can take an age to fix. The following exercises aren't a miracle cure, in fact they are primarily a preventative measure intended to loosen up and strengthen the muscles supporting the spine; but, under medical supervision, they are also useful as remedial therapy. More back exercises can be found in Easy Everyday Exercises – Healthy Living HL10. Should you wish to try any or all of these, **please check with your doctor first** to avoid making any existing medical condition worse.

The only gear you will need is a floor, with some cushioning if there's no carpet; plus a couple of chairs, the seats of which are roughly the same height. Stretches should be **held for a count of five** before returning to the start position, these to be **repeated five times for each limb**. Only stretch until the muscles or hamstrings begin to pull, but don't go past that point; and if you already have a sore back, wait until it is better before trying this program. If you think you might be okay to give it a go and do feel pain of any kind, quit the exercises and wait a while longer.

Lower Back Stretch - Floor



Lay face down on the floor, legs spread and hands flat just in front of and about six inches out from the shoulders. Breathe out and suck in the stomach muscles.



Now, push up until the arms are straight and the elbows are locked. The pelvis will probably have risen a bit, so try to ease this back onto the floor. Hold the stretch for a count of five. Inhale as you lower yourself down. Repeat five times. This exercise is similar to kneeling push-ups and is also good for shoulders and upper body.

Upper Back Stretch – Floor



Here's one for the two long muscles that run either side of the spine from the shoulder blades to the waist. Once again, lay face down but this time keep legs together, toes pointing away from the body. With arms straight out in front, point the fingers as if about to dive into a swimming pool.



Keeping the arm straight and body flat, raise the left hand as far off the floor as possible, hold for a count of five and return to the start position. Only do this once. Now perform the same exercise with the right hand. You'll notice from the photo that the hand barely comes off the floor. This will improve over time as the muscles strengthen.



Next, the legs get their turn - first left, then right. **That's the complete set which should be repeated five times.** There will be a tendency to roll the body off the floor with each limb-raise in an attempt to get as high as possible. Resist this, especially when doing the exercises for the first time. It's not about how high, just to feel those muscles stretching.

One last set to come...

Lower Back and Hamstring Stretch – Chairs



Position two chairs so that you can sit on one and place the right foot on the other, leg straight. Leave the left foot on the floor with the leg in the normal sitting position. Loosely place both hands either side of the knee.



Breathe out and suck the stomach muscles in; then, keeping the knee of the outstretched leg locked, lean forward and slide the hands towards the foot. Go as far as you can, just until the hamstring begins to stretch, hold for a count of five, and return to the upright position. Repeat for the right leg five times before switching to the left. For the first stretch, you may be lucky to even reach the ankle, but you should find an improvement by stretch five. If not, don't worry - it may take a few days to loosen up those muscles, but it will happen if you persist.

And Remember:

It isn't a competition, so there's no rush to complete the daily routine. Take it easy, especially to begin with. And do check with your medical practitioner first to make doubly sure it is safe for you to perform any or all of the exercises.

Next issue: Fat, the "F" word - Say it, then do something about it!

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