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Simple back exercises

(Recommended by Chartered Physiotherapist)

One very powerful way of controlling your back pain is to do daily range of motion exercises, putting your back through full movement several times a day. This prevents stiffness developing and stretches all the attached muscles, making them less vulnerable to sudden demands.

Please note that exercises can make your pain worse as well as better. If you have any doubts, please consult your physio, or GP.

These exercises are meant to maintain range of motion or regain loss of movement in the back region and to help control pain. Regular performance of movements can help with pain problems.

They are simple and not magical in any way. However, with regular performance, you should find your problems are improved. If you have long term back pain with some disability these exercises may help mobility but may not be very effective against pain.

Do each movement slowly five times, resting a short time in between each set of movements. Do two or three times a day although more often can be useful. You can increase the numbers over time as you get more confident.

**1. One leg to chest**

Lie on your back with your legs straight out. Bend one leg up, pulling your knee up towards your chest with your hands. Alternate sides.

Try and keep the other leg down as you pull your leg up to the chest. Hold the position for a few seconds at the top of the movement.

**2. Knee rolling**

Lie on your back with your knees bent up and feet flat on the surface. Keep your knees together and roll them steadily from side to side.

If you have a lot of mobility you may be able to get your leading knee to touch the surface. Often you will not be able to allow a large movement initially as it may be uncomfortable, so keep a smooth and gentle motion going within your comfort zone. There is very little rotation in the lumbar spine but nevertheless this movement is often uncomfortable in the low back and can be useful as part of your exercise programme.

**3. Pelvic tilting**

Lie on your back with your knees bent up and feet on the surface. Start by tilting your pelvis a little so your back arches a bit. This picture shows her arching her back rather a lot and you may not need to try and go this far in your own exercise.

Now press the small of your back down to the surface and tuck your bottom under. Do not lift your buttocks up, this is a forward and back rocking motion and often tricky to get right.

You should feel the small of your back has pushed down against the surface. If put your hand under your back when you arch slightly you will feel the pressure as you tilt correctly in the opposite direction. When you get good at this you can use it to control the amount of pelvic tilt you have in your back in standing and to perform the [core stability](http://www.thephysiotherapysite.co.uk/back/core_stability.html) exercises which are thought to play such an important part in back pain related problems these days.

**4. Hip hitching**

Lie on your back with your legs out straight. Shorten and lengthen each leg alternately, pulling up each side above the hip bones. Do this slowly and smoothly, it can be quite aggravating for the back if you go at it too hard and jerkily.

This exercise is really done from the waist, pulling the pelvis up at each side whilst keeping the knees straight. It’s easy to let the knees bend then this becomes a leg exercise and not a back one. It feels a bit strange and can be a little severe on the back joints so it’s good to go easy. Some people jerk it strongly and I recommend you develop a smooth, easy rhythm for best results.

This pushes and pulls at the range of movement of the small facet joints at each side of the back and can be useful for reducing stiffness in particular.

**5. Both knees to chest**

Lie on your back, bend one knee and hold on with the same hand then do the same with the other leg. Pull both legs up towards the chest, gently at first. NB If you have a recent disc problem this can make you worse. This exercise can feel very stretchy at first as many of us do not flex our lumbar spines fully in normal life. You may not be able to get your knees up as far as she can but that doesn’t matter to start with. Go as far as you easily can and you will see improvement steadily with time.

**6. Back arching**

Lie on your front. Get up so you are resting on your forearms, as if you are lying on the beach and looking out to sea, then lie down again.

If you find this difficult you might need to start by just lying on your front for a short period of time for your back to get used to being in extension of some degree.

Your back and hips should be relaxed as you let them go and remain where they want. The only work you are doing is supporting your upper body weight with your arms and shoulders.

**7. Standing exercises**

If you have a long term problem and wish to keep spinal mobility it can be useful to do movements when you may not be willing or able to go somewhere to lie down.

a) Forward bending

Yes! This is not a dangerous movement and is important to maintain as many of the normal things we do in life require it.

Slowly bend over as if you are trying to touch your toes, then return to the vertical. Don’t bounce, push or hold, just do a smooth movement.

Don’t worry if you do not get anywhere near your knees, it doesn’t matter at all. Regular use of this movement can be very useful to maintain a healthy back as it is one we tend to avoid, especially if we have had back pain problems in the past.

b) Side bending

Stand with your hands against the sides of your thighs. Slide one hand down the same thigh, bending to that side and avoiding any twisting, as if you are stuck between two panes of glass.

Do to one side, then give yourself a short rest before doing the other. I find it unpleasant if I go from one side to the other straight away. See how you feel.

This can be quite a severe movement so go easy, allowing the range to increase slowly as you do it. It pushes the facet joints of the lumbar spine together and is a somewhat unnatural movement as it tends not to occur on its own.

c) Arching

Stand with your palms against your buttocks, as if you are holding on to them. Move your hips forward, then lean back as far as you easily can.

This can feel a bit tricky to start with but go easily and you will find it easier with time. This can be a very useful movement to do if you have a disc related problem and can’t lie down to do prone back extensions (press-ups).

**PRIVATE PHYSIOTHERAPY (recommended by other patients)**

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1st appt £45; £40 after that