

Back Strengthening Exercises

Low Back pain is very common among adults and is often caused by overuse and muscle strain or injury. Exercise may not only help decrease low back pain, but it may also help prevent injury or re-injury to your back, and reduce the risk of disability from back pain. Exercises to reduce low back pain are not complicated and can be done at home without any special equipment. Below are some examples of exercises that can be done at work and home. If you are under the care of a physician, you must get approval prior to performing any of these exercises.

Exercises that can easily be done at home

Hip Bridge



1. Lay flat on back - knees bent and hands straight and flat at side
2. Feet flat and shoulder width apart
3. Tighten abs the squeeze and slowly lift buttocks until your knees form a straight line with your shoulders (hands remain flat at side)
4. Hold in straight position for two seconds keeping abs tight
5. Slowly return buttocks back to floor
6. Repeat 5 times (for beginners) work your way up to 10-12 reps

What it does: This move counteracts the effects of too much chair time, which puts excessive pressure on the spine. It stretches the hip flexors and strengthens the muscles that stabilize the spine, including those of the lower back, the gluteals, and the large, stabilizing abdominal muscles.

Make it harder: Lift one foot off the floor and hold it straight up toward the ceiling, foot flexed, keeping the hips even. This is much more challenging, so start by holding this pose for just a few seconds. Repeat five to eight times, and then switch legs.

Bird Dog



1. Start on all fours with knees hip width apart (directly under the hips) and hands shoulder width apart with palms flat on floor
2. Tighten your abs
3. Extend right arm fully forward while extending left leg fully back
4. Hold position for 10 seconds
5. Return hand and leg to starting position
6. Repeat 5 times on each side for beginners. If more advanced do 3 sets of 10 reps on each side.

What it does: This exercise improves muscle balance and coordination, making it easier to keep the spine stable for everyday moves, such as walking, running, dancing, and carrying a child. It also tones your glutes, upper back, lower spine, and hamstrings. Tighter abs also keeps the spine supported.

Make it harder: Gradually increase the holding time for 10 to 12 counts. For an additional challenge, add movement to the mix by slowly lifting and lowering the extended arm and leg a few inches, maintaining proper form throughout

Side Plank



1. Lie on your left side place elbows directly under shoulders
2. Tighten your abdominals while lifting your hips off the floor
3. Keep neck aligned with spine and hips square

4. Hold for 30 seconds then lower hips back to floor
5. Repeat 3 times on each side

What it does: Builds strength and endurance in the core. This will help keep your lower back protected and stable during activities that require movement in the hips or back.

Make it harder: While holding the basic position, lift and lower your top leg. Gradually work toward holding the upper leg for 5 to 10 counts. Another option: Instead of resting on your forearm, support your body with your hand, palm on the floor and under the shoulder, elbow straight.

Lunge



1. With your abs gently contracted and hands on hips, take a big step forward with your right foot.
2. Sink down so your right knee is at a 90-degree angle
3. Push back to the starting position without pausing.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times, then switch legs and repeat.

What it does: Improves whole-body control, which is key to protecting the spine during walking, running, or stair-climbing. Recruits both surface and deeper stabilizing muscles along the sides, glutes, hamstrings, quads, and calves.

Make it harder: Set up to do a basic lunge, but this time step your right foot out on a diagonal, not straight ahead, as if the foot is pointing to 2 o'clock on a clock face. (When you lunge with the left foot, step it out to 10 o'clock.) The change in foot placement makes it harder to balance. As you get stronger, try it with your hands interlaced behind your head or hold a dumbbell in each hand to increase resistance.

Exercises that can easily be done at work

Chin Drop

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
2. Hold your head so that you are looking directly forward.
3. Slowly drop your chin toward your chest making sure that you don't drop it so far that you feel an uncomfortable pull in your upper back.
4. Hold for 5 seconds.
5. Return to starting position and repeat several times.

This exercise may also be done in a sitting position.

Upper Back Stretch

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart
2. Bringing your hands behind your back, interlock your fingers.
3. Draw your arms as close together as possible and bend forward.
4. Hold at a comfortable position for 5 seconds.
5. Return to starting position and repeat several times.

Upper Back and Arm Stretch

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
2. Bring both arms straight forward, at a 90 degree angle with the floor.
3. Turning the palms of your hands away from you, interlock your fingers.
4. Pull your hands away from your body until you feel a comfortable stretch in your upper back.
5. Hold for 5 seconds.
6. Return to starting position and repeat several times.

This exercise may also be done in a sitting position.

Shoulder Blade Squeeze

1. While seated or standing place hands behind your head with your thumbs pointing toward the floor.
2. Pull your elbows back slightly as though squeezing your shoulder blades together.
3. Hold for a couple of seconds.
4. Return to starting position and repeat several times.

Arm Raise

1. While in a seated or standing position raise both arms straight above your head, interlocking your fingers.
2. Turn your palms up toward the ceiling and gently pull your hands away from you.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Return to starting position and repeat several times.