

## **Reducing and preventing Low Back Pain**

### **The Problem**

Regardless of whether you exercise regularly or are the type of person who sweats just thinking about a tough training session, the chances are, you or at least someone you know has suffered from back pain recently. How many of you try bending and stretching every which way to get rid of the pain in your back whilst sitting at your computer screen? Or how many of the ladies reading this have been out all day (or night) in high heels and suffered from back pain? Maybe your back is aching just reading this! In fact, recent figures suggest that around 80% of the American population suffer from low back pain at some point in their lives! This figure will be very similar for our very own obesity ridden country.

The point I am making through my scare tactics of shocking statistics, is that low back pain is very common and when you suffer from it and you probably will, at best it will disrupt your gym routine and prevent you achieving your best. At worst however, you can suffer from months of pain that affects everything in your daily life!

Hopefully by this point I've got your attention and the 80% of you ticking time bombs will now devote a few minutes of your time to reading the rest of this article and learning how best to reduce the risks of back pain!

### **The Cause**

The cause of everyone's lower back pain really is the million dollar question, and in truth it is often very hard to diagnose the exact causes. With this in mind, it is important to understand that everyone is individual and whilst I will provide information and exercises that will help a lot of people, this may not be the case for everyone depending on the nature of the specific injury or pain you may have.

Like most injuries, low back pain can be brought on by either an acute injury or trauma to the area or more commonly from general wear and tear from years of bad posture throughout our largely sedentary lives. For most people their back pain cannot be pinpointed to a specific incident but is rather brought about simply as a product of our modern lifestyles - too much time spent sitting, at work, driving to work, at home on the sofa! Our bodies were designed to move around and when we don't do that it creates muscular imbalances.

So what are these 'imbalances' I'm talking about?

It means that certain muscles become overly tight and their opposite muscles get lengthened meaning they can't work properly. This in itself can cause aching and pain because the muscles become knotted up and generally pulled out of their optimum position. This often occurs in the muscles around the neck and upper back, they may even be aching as you read this on your computer!

As previously mentioned, these imbalances are mainly caused by holding the body in one position for a prolonged period, for instance sitting at your desk 9 hours a day 5 days a week! Unless you maintain perfect posture throughout your working day, this will lead to tight chest and shoulder muscles, tight hip flexors and weak bum and

stomach muscles. Another problem with this, is that other muscles have to pick up the workload of those that have become weak and switched off. This is often the case for the lower back, far from being weak, the muscles are often doing the job of both the bum and stomach muscles. So when you pick up a heavy box, because your bum muscles aren't working the back muscles have to produce the movement and because your stomach muscles are also weak, the lower back also has to stabilise the trunk at the same time! Recipe for disaster? I think so!

Obviously I am generalising a lot here, however, below are a few tips and exercises that could help to greatly alleviate your symptoms if followed correctly:

- We need to stretch out the tight muscles. Perform the following stretches at least once a day (preferably more) and hold each stretch for 20-30 seconds.

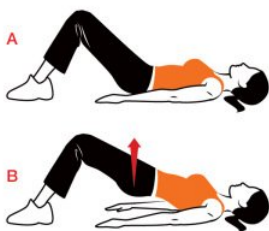


**Hip flexor stretch:** Kneel down, keep chest up and squeeze shoulder blades back. Squeeze bum muscle of trailing leg and gently lean your weight forward onto your front knee until you feel a stretch on the front of the hip of the trailing leg.

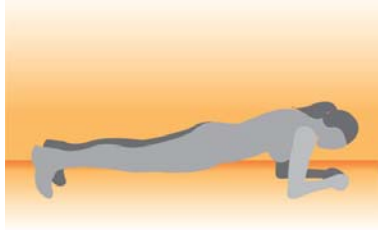


**Chest Stretch:** Place your arm against a wall as shown, squeeze your bum muscles and hold your stomach tight. Ease the chest forwards until you feel the stretch across your chest and the front of your shoulder, ensure you do not arch your lower back.

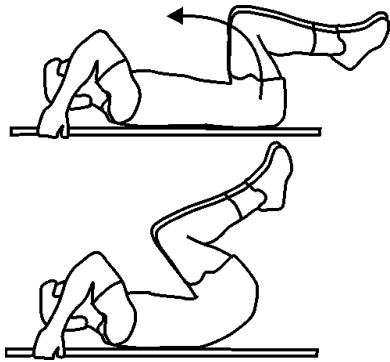
- Now we must strengthen the weak muscles, perform these exercises every other day:



**Glute Bridge:** Lay on the floor as shown, squeeze your bum muscles to raise your hips up. Only go as far as the bum muscles take you, try not to use your lower back, initially you may only move a few centimetres. Hold at the top of the movement for 3 seconds then relax. Perform 3x15.

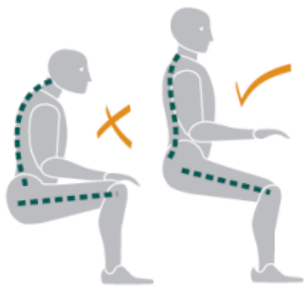


**Plank:** Hold your body in a straight line, resting on your forearms and toes. Hold the stomach tight, squeeze your bum muscles hard and push your heels towards the floor. Do not allow the hips to drop towards the floor as this will put pressure on your lower back. Hold for as long as possible up to 1 minute.



**Reverse Crunches:** Lay on the floor as shown, holding on to something stable behind your head. Contract your stomach muscles to pull your knees towards your chest and slowly lower them down. This should be a slow controlled movement, do not swing the legs.

- Try to maintain correct posture in everything you do, sitting at work, driving, watching T.V. This will be hard to begin with and take a conscious effort, it is however the most important factor!



Sit up tall, with chest up and shoulders squeezed back and down. Tuck the chin slightly so it does not protrude forwards.

- Finally and most simply, move around more! Our bodies weren't designed to sit for prolonged periods, so get active! If your job requires you to sit, try to change position or even better get up and walk around every 20minutes to avoid your muscles getting used to their shortened position.

Justin Mills BSc, ASCC  
Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist