



back care

A GUIDE TO PREVENT AND MANAGE
YOUR RECURRING BACK PAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone will have back pain at some point in their life. There is a very high chance (86 percent) that your back pain will return. Even as your back pain goes away, studies show that your back and stomach muscles stay weak. Lack of flexibility in your legs adds stress to your back and makes you more susceptible to flare-ups or reinjury. The good news is that you can manage or prevent your back pain flare-ups by focusing on the following three areas:

- Proper movements and positions for daily activities
- Your emotional and overall health
- Regular exercise that includes aerobic exercise, strengthening your core muscles, and stretching

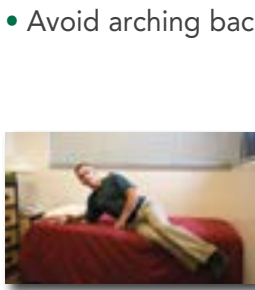


DAILY ACTIVITIES

Learn to move in ways that do not put strain on your back.
Continue to move correctly even when you no longer have pain.



- Bend at your knees and hips when you do activities such as picking something up off the floor, lifting up objects, brushing your teeth, shaving, putting on makeup, or washing the dishes.



- Avoid arching backwards when you reach overhead.
- Roll over when you get out of bed rather than sitting straight up.

SITTING ACTIVITIES

- Sit with your knees below the level of your hips.
- Use a comfortable back support.
- Make sure your work area is set up comfortably for your back.
- Keep frequently used objects such as the phone, files, and your mouse close by.
- Avoid twisting when getting out of your chair, or when you file or do other related tasks.
- **Get out of your chair and stand or walk for 1 to 2 minutes after every 30 minutes of sitting.**

EMOTIONS AND YOUR OVERALL HEALTH

Emotions affect your back and every part of your body. This is what we mean by the “mind-body” response. Be sure to:

- Reduce your stress and anxiety level. Back pain is commonly associated with high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Studies show that people who do not treat these issues have a slower recovery from back pain.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Maintain a healthy weight and exercise on a regular basis.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet; eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid tobacco products like cigarettes, cigars, or chewing tobacco.
- Healthy family relationships can affect your health and your ability to get better. Visit kp.org/domesticviolence and click on “Get Help” on the left side of the screen for more information.
- For a personalized online program for the tips mentioned, visit your doctor’s home page at kp.org/mydoctor, and click on “Online programs” under “Healthy Living Resources” on the left side of the screen. Click on “Healthy Lifestyle Programs” and get started today.

Not connected to the Internet? Visit your local Health Education Department or your doctor to learn about local resources.



INCORPORATE REGULAR EXERCISE INTO YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

It is important to do some strengthening, stretching, and aerobic exercise every day to prevent and manage flare-ups. Strengthening exercises include those for your back and core muscles. Stretching exercises include those for your back, hips, and legs. You will find samples of each of these types of exercises on the following pages.

Important to remember: If pain or other symptoms increase while you are doing any of the exercises listed below, stop doing them. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist about modifying the exercise or doing a different exercise that does not increase your pain.

Aerobic exercise



You will recover faster if you are in good physical condition. Walking, biking, or pool exercises are good ways to become fit and stay in good physical condition. **Spread your activity out during the week and even into smaller chunks of time during the day.** Begin with 10 minutes of moderate activity, 3 times a day, 5 days a week and if you are able, work up to 60 minutes per day, 5 days a week. If you sit a lot during the day, consider walking during your breaks.

Back stabilization and core strengthening

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Find your **neutral position** by gently arching and flattening your back until you find a position where you are most comfortable.

Gently tighten your stomach muscles without moving your back out of the **neutral position**.

Hold 5 to 10 seconds and repeat 10 times. Do this 3 or more times every day.



Adding arm or leg movement

Begin with your knees bent. Throughout the exercise, find and hold your **neutral position** as described on page 5. Then:

- A. Lift one arm overhead slowly. Return to the start position, then lift the other arm overhead slowly. Do not let your stomach or back position change.
- B. Lift one foot 1 to 2 inches off the floor. Lower it slowly. Repeat with the other foot and continue alternating legs as if taking small steps. Do not let your stomach or back position change.
- C. Progress to lifting one foot and opposite arm overhead at the same time. Lower both and repeat with the other side. Continue alternating sides.

Do these exercises 5 to 10 times slowly, 3 or more times every day.



Back stretch: all 4s stretch

Start on your hands and knees with your back in a comfortable position (figure A). Relax your stomach and buttock muscles and let your back sag (figure B). Return to the start position. Arch your back up toward the ceiling (figure C). Return to the start position. Hold each position for 10 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



Hip and leg stretches: front of thigh stretch—quadriceps

Place your foot on a chair behind you. Gently tighten your buttock muscles to protect your back.

You should feel a stretch in the front of your upper leg. Hold 30 to 60 seconds and repeat 2 times.



Hip and leg stretches: back of thigh stretch—hamstrings

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Place a strap or your hands behind the leg you want to stretch.

Gently straighten your knee until you feel a pulling sensation in the back of your thigh.

Hold 30 to 60 seconds and repeat 2 times.



Alternate position: You may straighten the opposite leg to increase the stretch in the leg you are stretching.



CALL YOUR DOCTOR WHEN YOU HAVE . . .

- Severe pain in your belly, back, or chest.
- Recent changes in your bowel or bladder control or difficulty initiating urination.
- Any new weakness or numbness in one or both legs.
- A fever that does not go away.
- Pain or numbness in the genital region.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Connect to our website at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Visit your doctor or physical therapist's home page at kp.org/mydoctor to learn about our interactive WebCare for Back Pain program. It offers personalized recommendations to relieve pain, along with video demonstrations.
- When your back feels better, go to your doctor or your physical therapist's home page at kp.org/mydoctor, click on the "Healthy Living Resources," select "videos," and then select the "Spine Care Exercise Videos."
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.



Your physical therapist or doctor recommends the following personalized exercise program for you. Please follow your physical therapist's instructions on how often to hold or repeat each one. If your symptoms feel worse with any exercise, stop doing the exercise until you check with your physical therapist or your doctor.