

# Relieving, Treating and Preventing Low Back Pain



More than 80% of people in the United States experience an episode of low back pain during their lives. Most cases of low back pain can be linked to muscle strain, injury or overuse. A small percent of low back pain can be caused by more specific conditions of the spine that your doctor can diagnose and explain further. Most episodes of low back pain (95%) will get better in a few months; however, some patients will go on to develop chronic low back pain lasting longer than 3 months. It is also common for low back pain to reoccur.

## General recommendations for low back pain

- **Stay active** by gradually progressing toward your normal level of activity as tolerated. Bed rest for longer than a day can slow down your recovery.
- **Avoid prolonged sitting**, driving, bending, heavy lifting and twisting in the early stages of pain.
- **Apply ice** to lower back for 10 – 15 minutes every 1 – 2 hours—ice is helpful in reducing pain and muscle spasm.
- **Avoid using heat** for the first 48 hours of an acute injury.

### ■ Gentle exercise for mobility and stretching of the muscles of the legs and back

early on can help decrease the severity, duration and recurrence of low back pain. Try the suggested exercises on the back of this sheet. **Do not perform exercises that increase your pain.**



- **Modify your sleeping/lying position**, sitting position or workstation as you are able. (See reverse for suggestions.)
- **Wear supportive shoes** to help reduce or eliminate low back pain. Supportive shoes can align your legs, knees and back and help reduce shock while walking or running. While VMC doesn't endorse specific vendors, you may want to research [shoesnfeet.com](http://shoesnfeet.com) or [roadrunnersports.com](http://roadrunnersports.com).

## Preventing lower back pain

- Use proper lifting and body mechanics.
- Be aware of your posture.
- Once the severity of pain has decreased, you can help prevent recurrence with a regular exercise program that includes strengthening your abdominals, back and hips.

## Get more information about low back pain

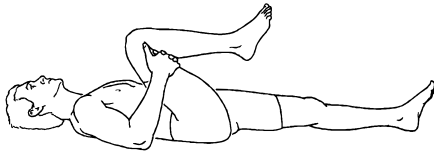
Go to [valleymed.org](http://valleymed.org) and click on **Health Info. Search for Low Back Pain**. We have multiple resources for you to learn about your condition, such as easy to read handouts, videos, podcasts and exercises.

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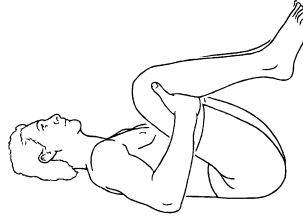
BACK - 18 Knee-to-Chest Stretch: Unilateral



With hand behind right knee, pull knee in to chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in lower back and buttocks. Keep back relaxed. Hold 20 seconds.

Repeat 2 times per set.  
Do 3 sessions per day.

BACK - 19 Knee-to-Chest Stretch: Bilateral

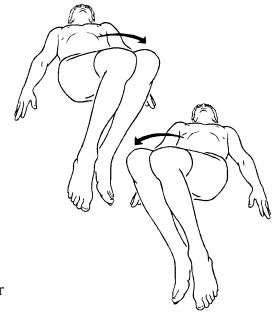


With hands behind knees, pull both knees in to chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in lower back and buttocks. Keep back relaxed. Hold 20 seconds.

Repeat 2 times per set.  
Do 3 sessions per day.

BACK - 35 Lumbar Rotation (Non-Weight Bearing)

With feet on floor, slowly rock knees from side to side in small, pain-free range of motion. Allow lower back to rotate slightly.



Repeat 10-20 times per set.  
Do 1 sets per session.  
Do 2 sessions per day.

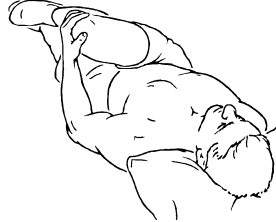
HIP / KNEE - 40 Stretching: Hamstring (Sitting)



With right leg straight, tuck other foot near groin. Reach down until stretch is felt in back of thigh. Keep back straight. Hold 20 seconds.

Repeat 2 times per set.  
Do 3 sessions per day.

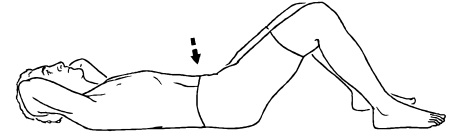
HIP / KNEE - 66 Stretching: Piriformis (Supine)



Pull right knee toward opposite shoulder. Hold 20 seconds. Relax.

Repeat 2 times per set.  
Do 3 sessions per day.

Core



Draw in lower abdominal muscles, as if trying to stop urine. Next tighten or draw in abdominal muscles toward spine. Keep gentle and do not hold your breath. Repeat lying down, seated and standing

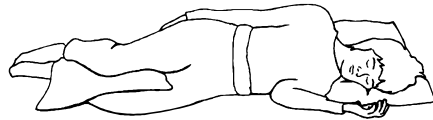
Hold for 5-10 seconds, repeat 10 repetitions per session  
Do 3-5 sessions per day for a total of 30-50 repetitions.

POSITIONING - 1  
Sleeping on Back



Place pillow under knees. A pillow with cervical support and a roll around waist are also helpful. For pain relief you can also try to lie on back with knees and hips in 90 degrees of flexion with use of ice or heat as needed for 10-20 minutes at a time.

POSITIONING - 2  
Sleeping on Side



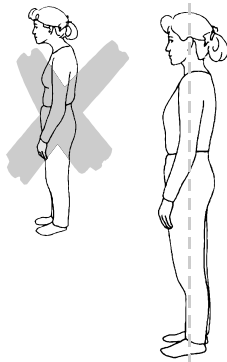
Place pillow between knees. Use cervical support under neck and a roll around waist as needed.

LIFTING - 11  
Lifting Principles

- Maintain proper posture and head alignment.
- Slide object as close as possible before lifting.
- Move obstacles out of the way.
- Test before lifting; ask for help if too heavy.
- Tighten stomach muscles without holding breath.
- Use smooth movements; do not jerk.
- Use legs to do the work, and pivot with feet.
- Distribute the work load symmetrically and close to the center of trunk.
- Push instead of pull whenever possible.

POSITIONING - 4  
Posture - Standing

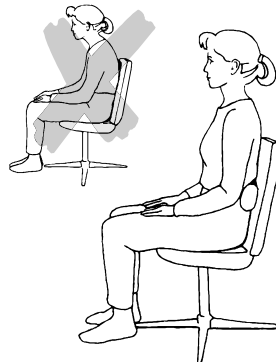
Good posture is important. Avoid slouching and forward head thrust. Maintain curve in low back and align ears over shoulders, hips over ankles.



Exercise routines © VHI. All rights reserved.

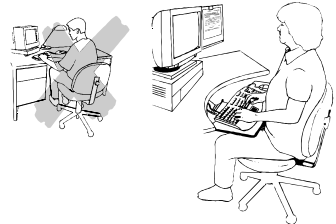
POSITIONING - 6  
Posture - Sitting

Sit upright, head facing forward. Try using a roll to support lower back. Keep shoulders relaxed, and avoid rounded back. Keep hips level with knees. Avoid crossing legs for long periods.



POSITIONING - 13  
Computer Work

Position work to face forward. Use proper work and seat height. Keep shoulders back and down, wrists straight, and elbows at right angles. Use chair that provides full back support. Add footrest and lumbar roll as needed.



View exercise video at [valleymed.org/lowbackpain](http://valleymed.org/lowbackpain).

If you experience increasing or severe pain while completing these exercises, please discontinue and contact your physician.

From the physical therapy specialists at Rehabilitation Services and the Lifestyle Medicine Clinic.

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