

Back Pain: How to Relieve Low Back Pain



Back strain happens when you overstretch, or pull, a muscle in your back. You may hurt your back in an accident or when you exercise or lift something.

Most back pain will get better with rest and time. You can take care of yourself at home to help your back heal. Call your doctor if your pain does not improve after 2 weeks of home care.

How can you relieve the strain?

Home treatment will often help relieve back pain that is caused by minor injuries.

- Rest your back. Stop or reduce any activity that causes pain.
- Try using a heating pad on a low or medium setting for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours. Or you can buy single-use heat wraps that last up to 8 hours. You can also try an ice pack for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed. Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless your doctor tells you to.
- Try sleeping on your side with a pillow between your legs.

- Do not sit up in bed, and avoid soft couches and twisted positions. Avoid bed rest. Staying in bed for more than 1 or 2 days can make your problem worse.
- If you must sit for long periods of time, take breaks from sitting. Get up and walk around, or lie down in a comfortable position. Change positions every 30 minutes.
- Return to work and other activities as soon as you can. Continued rest without activity is usually not good for your back.

Stretching and exercising

When muscles get tight and stay that way, they become less flexible. Tight back muscles can throw your spine out of balance. They make it harder for you to move. They make you feel stiff.

Exercises that increase flexibility may relieve your pain and make it easier for your muscles to keep your spine in a good, neutral position.

- Take short walks several times a day. Start with 5 to 10 minutes, 3 to 4 times a day, and work up to longer walks. Stick to level surfaces and avoid hills and stairs until your back is better.
- Light exercise, such as walking and swimming, can help blood flow to your back and promote healing. This also strengthens muscles in your stomach and back.

Self-massage

Massage can help relax your tense muscles and relieve pain.

There are a number of products on the market that can help you massage your own back muscles. Or you can give yourself a back massage using a tennis ball.

- First take a hot bath or shower to relax. Do a few easy stretching exercises.
- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Put the tennis ball under your lower back.
- Take a deep breath and relax into the ball as much as you can. Hold for a few seconds, then lift yourself and move the ball to another area.
- You can also do this massage with two tennis balls stuffed into a sock. Lie on the tennis balls with one ball on each side of your spine.

Stress management

Back pain can lead to a vicious cycle: Distress about the pain tenses the muscles in your lower back, which in turn causes more pain.

Here are a few things you can do to relax your mind and your muscles:

- Take 10 to 15 minutes to sit quietly and breathe deeply. Try to focus only on your breathing. If you cannot keep thoughts

away, concentrate on things that make you feel good.

- Get involved in your favorite hobby, or try a new activity that you think you would enjoy.
- Talk to a friend, read a book, or listen to your favorite music.
- Consult with a professional counselor.

Muscle relaxation may also reduce anxiety and distress, improve your sleep, and distract you from pain. Several relaxation techniques are available. Ask your doctor about relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, biofeedback, meditation, visualization, self-hypnosis, and affirmations.

Yoga and breathing

Some types of yoga include meditation and gentle exercises to help you improve flexibility and breathing, decrease stress, and maintain health. Make sure you pick a gentle course and avoid aggressive poses.