

General Recommendations for Maintaining a Healthy Back

Source: CS-PIER-0118; Transitioned from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health March 2022. Access: Mar, 11, 2025

URL: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/sites/default/files/2022-03/CS-PIER-0118-Recommendations-Maintaining-Healthy-Back.pdf>

Understanding Your Back

Your spine features three compensating curves made up of vertebrae that work with discs, muscles, and ligaments to balance the weight of your body. If the curves lose their proper relationship, additional pressure is placed on the vertebrae and discs. This pressure can cause back pain.

Reduce Your Chances of Back Pain

Practice good back care habits to keep your spine in correct alignment. Use correct standing, sitting and walking postures as well as good lifting and carrying techniques.

Good spine care also involves strengthening muscles in your back and abdomen. Studies show that well-balanced core muscles stabilize the spine and create support for all other movement.

Factors that Contribute to Lower Back Pain

- 🦋 **Smoking:** Smoking inhibits the body's ability to supply nutrients and oxygen to the spinal discs, which can cause their aging and deterioration.
- 🦋 **Age:** Back pain becomes more common as people age. The discs between the vertebrae dry out and lose some of their cushioning ability as the spine becomes stiffer.
- 🦋 **Fitness Level:** Weak abdominal and back muscles increase the chance of back pain.
- 🦋 **Diet:** A high calorie diet combined with an inactive lifestyle can lead to obesity. This extra weight puts stress on the spine.

Proper Standing Posture

- ✓ Chest raised
- ✓ Shoulders back and relaxed
- ✓ Abdomen and buttocks pulled in
- ✓ Chin and knees relaxed
- ✓ Feet slightly apart with weight evenly distributed



Proper Sitting Posture

- ✓ Neck, Shoulder and upper back muscles relaxed
- ✓ Shoulders rounded back
- ✓ Feet flat on the floor
- ✓ Knees bent at 90° angle
- ✓ Thighs level with hips
- ✓ Back comfortably pressed against chair back.
- ✓ Small lumbar support at the small of back for extra support.



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Exercises to Increase Muscle Strength

Exercises may be modified at first. Your goal is to keep moving and gradually to full activity.

Partial Sit-up or Crunch: Strengthens abdominal muscles

- * Lie on back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor and arms crossed over chest.
- * Raise head and shoulders slightly until shoulder blades are just off floor. (You may not be able to get far at first.)
Hold for ____ seconds. Relax to the floor.
Do ____ repetitions.



Reverse Crunch: Strengthens abdominal muscles

- * Lie on back with hands at sides and knees bent.
- * Raise feet off floor with ankles crossed so knees create a 90 degree angle.
- * Tighten abdominal muscles, lift tail bone off floor.
- * Raise hips towards rib cage. (You may need to use hands for stabilization at first, but rely on them less as you get stronger.)
Hold for ____ seconds. Relax to the floor.
Do ____ repetitions.



Pelvic Lift: Strengthens buttocks and abdomen

- * Lie on back with knees bent, feet flat on floor and arms at sides.
- * Raise hips upwards without arching back.
- * Keep body in a straight line from shoulders to knees.
Hold for ____ seconds. Do ____ repetitions.



Arm and Leg Reach: Strengthens buttocks, abdomen and shoulders

- * Kneel on hands and knees with neck parallel to floor.
- * Keep weight evenly distributed, knees hip-width apart and back straight.
- * Stretch one arm straight.
Hold for ____ seconds. Return arm to start.
Do ____ repetitions. Switch arms and repeat.



- * Next, lift one leg straight,
Hold for ____ seconds. Return leg to start.
Do ____ repetitions. Switch legs and repeat.



- * As you get stronger, raise opposite arm and leg at the same time.
Hold for ____ seconds.



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Bicycle: strengthens buttocks, abdomen and shoulders

- ✳ Lie flat on back. Place fingers on head.
- ✳ Tighten abdominal muscles and bring knees to a 45 degree angle.
- ✳ Lift shoulders off the ground. Turn upper body to the left, bringing the right elbow toward the left knee and extended right leg in a cycling motion.
- ✳ Switch sides and repeat.
Do ____ repetitions. Switch to the other arm and repeat.



Exercise Ball Crunch: strengthens abdominal muscles, improves balance

- ✳ Sit on ball with feet flat on the floor, about hip-width apart.
- ✳ Let ball roll back slowly until thighs and hips are parallel to the floor.
- ✳ Place fingers on head. Keeping lower body motionless, contract abdominal muscles.
- ✳ Slowly flex forward and lift shoulders off the ball.
Do ____ repetitions.



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Low Back Pain Pattern #1 – Patient Education

Source: CS-PIER-0119; Transitioned from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health February 2022. Access: Mar, 11, 2025

URL: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/sites/default/files/2022-02/CS-PIER-0119-Guide-Back-Exercises-1.pdf>

Symptoms in Pattern 1 low back pain also known as mechanical pain:

- 🚫 Pain is worst in the back, buttocks, upper thigh, or groin but may radiate to the legs.
- 🚫 Pain may be constant or intermittent.
- 🚫 Pain is worse when sitting or bending forward.
- 🚫 Pain may be eased by bending backwards.
- 🚫 Walking and standing are better than sitting.

Positions and Exercises

The following rest positions can be used at home to rest your back and reduce pain.

“Z” Lie:

- ✳ Lie with back flat on floor, head supported by a pillow.
- ✳ Put feet on a chair with knees bent at more than a 90 degree angle. (May support buttocks with a pillow.)

Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Supine Lie:

- ✳ Lie on back, knees and head resting on pillows.

Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



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Prone Lie:

- ✳ Lie on stomach. Use three pillows to support hips.

Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Knees to Chest:

- ✳ Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor
- ✳ Slowly, bring knees up towards chest. Bringing the legs up one at a time makes it easier.
- ✳ Wrap arms behind knees and pull toward chest.

Hold for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Lumbar Roll - Sitting:

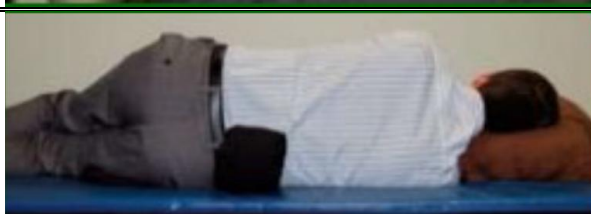
- ✳ Use a straight backed chair and ____ cm (____ inch) lumbar roll to support curve of the back.

Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Lumbar Roll - Night:

- ✳ Use lumbar night roll under mid-back when sleeping to support curve of the back.



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Other Care Information

For the first few days, you may only be able to lie on your stomach (see Prone Lie). Progress to prone extension using your arms, at your health care provider's recommendation.

Sloppy Pushup:

- * Lie on stomach with hands on either side of head.
 - * Keep lower body on floor and use arms to slowly raise upper body. (Hands may need to be positioned above head to fully extend elbows, while pelvis remains on the floor.)
 - * Keep back muscles relaxed.
- Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).
-



To strengthen your back muscles, your care provider may prescribe other exercises and stretches.

Please see **General Recommendations for Maintaining a Healthy Back: Patient Information.**

- * Your back will feel better when you walk or stand rather than sit. Schedule ____ minutes of walking every ____ hour(s).
- * When standing, place one foot on a stool to relieve pressure on your back.
- * Switch feet every 5 to 15 minutes. Maintain good posture.
- * Avoid rolling your spine forward. This may put more pressure on the painful areas and increase your discomfort.

Low Back Pain Pattern #2 – Patient Education

Source: CS-PIER-0120; Transitioned from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health February 2022. Access: Mar, 11, 2025

URL: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/sites/default/files/2022-02/CS-PIER-0120-Guide-Back-Exercises-2.pdf>

Symptoms in pattern 2 low back pain:

- * Pain is worst in the lower back and may spread to buttocks or legs.
- * Pain is always intermittent.
- * Pain is worse when bending backward and when standing or walking for extended periods.
- * Pain may be eased by bending forward or sitting.

Positions and Exercises

The following positions and exercises can be done at home to rest your back and reduce pain. Your health care provider will check the boxes next to the positions and exercises recommended for your condition.

“Z” Lie:

- * Lie with back flat on floor, head supported by a pillow.
 - * Put feet on a chair with knees bent at more than a 90° degree angle. (May support buttocks with a pillow.)
- Rest for ___ minutes every ___ hour(s).



Knees to Chest:

- * Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor
 - * Slowly, bring knees up towards chest. Bringing the legs up one at a time makes it easier. Wrap arms behind knees and pulling toward chest.
- Hold for ___ minutes every ___ hour(s).



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Sitting Flexion:

- ✳ Sit with feet flat on the floor, about hip-width apart.
- ✳ Lean forward to rest stomach on lap. Allow arms and head to hang near feet.
- ✳ With hands on knees, use arms to raise upper body.
Hold for ____ seconds.
Do ____ repetitions



Other Care Information

Progress to these exercises at your health care provider's recommendation

Trunk Flexion Stretch (sustained flexion):

- ✳ Kneel on hands and knees.
- ✳ Tuck in chin and arch back.
- ✳ Slowly sit back on heels, dropping shoulders towards floor.
Hold for ____ seconds, then relax.
Do ____ repetitions



Knees to Chest Stretch:

- ✳ Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on floor.
- ✳ Raise one knee to chest and slowly raise the other to meet it. (Use hands to lift knees if necessary.)
- ✳ Place hands around knees and pull gently to chest. Press back firmly against floor by flexing stomach muscles.
Hold for ____ seconds, then relax.
Do ____ repetitions.



Low Back Pain Pattern #3 - Patient Education

Source: CS-PIER-021; Transitioned from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health February 2022. Access: Mar, 11, 2025

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/sites/default/files/2022-02/CS-PIER-0121-Guide-Back-Exercises-3.pdf>

Symptoms in pattern 3 low back pain:

- ✓ Pain is mainly in the legs but back pain may be present.
- ✓ Pain is constant.
- ✓ Pain is often worse when sitting or bending, but in the acute stage can be made worse by any movement.
- ✓ Pain may be lessened in some rest positions.
- ✓ The best position is the one that most reduces the leg pain.
- ✓ There is no place for exercise or repeated movements.

Positions and Exercises

The best treatment is to schedule rest periods throughout the day. Lie down for ____ minutes each hour. Find the rest position that best reduces leg pain. Long-term bed rest is not recommended and can hinder recovery. Your health care provider may prescribe other medical therapies to decrease pain and will check the boxes next to the positions recommended for your condition.

“Z” Lie:

- * Lie with back flat on floor, head supported by a pillow.
- * Put feet on a chair with knees bent at more than a 90 degree angle. (May support buttocks with a pillow.)
Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Prone Lie:

- * Lie on stomach. Use three pillows to support hips. (May support hips and head with pillows.)
Rest for ____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



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Prone Lie on Elbows:

- * Lie face down on floor or bed.
- * Bend elbows and relax.
Rest for _____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Rest on Hands and Knees:

- * Kneel on hands and knees on floor or bed.
Rest for _____ minutes every ____ hour(s).



Lumbar Night Roll:

- * Wrap a night roll securely around waist when sleeping to support spine.



Lumbar Support When Sitting:

- * Use a straight backed chair and __ inch (__ cm) lumbar roll to support curve of back.



Please see **General Recommendations for Maintaining a Healthy Back: Patient Information** for more information about back care. Your health care provider may recommend stretches and exercises to strengthen your back and core muscles.

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Low Back Pain Pattern #4 - Patient Education

Source: CS-PIER-022; Transitioned from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health February 2022. Access: Mar, 11, 2025
<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/sites/default/files/2022-02/CS-PIER-0122-Guide-Back-Exercises-4.pdf>

Symptoms in pattern 4 low back pain:

- ✓ Pain is worst in legs and can be described as heaviness or aching.
- ✓ Pain is intermittent and is made worse by activity (often walking).
- ✓ Pain is relieved by a change in position, usually by bending forward.

Positions and Exercises

Pain should be relieved quickly with proper rest and flexion. When pain occurs in your legs, sit in a chair and lean forward until it subsides (see Sitting Flexion). Your health care provider will check the boxes next to the positions and exercises recommended for your condition.

Single Leg Abdominal Press:

- * Lie on back with knees bent.
- * Keep back in a neutral position and tighten abdominal muscles.
- * Lift one leg so knee and hip are at a 90 degree angle.
- * Press one hand against the knee while pulling it towards the hand. Keep elbow straight.
Hold for ____ seconds. Return to start position and repeat with opposite leg.
Do ____ repetitions



Pelvic Tilt

- * Lie on back, knees bent, arms on chest or at sides.
- * Place feet flat on floor, hip-width apart, with knees slightly closer together than feet.
- * Tighten abdominal muscles.
- * Press small of back against floor, causing front of pelvis to tilt forward.
Hold for ____ seconds and then relax.
Do ____ repetitions.



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Sitting Flexion:

- ✳ Sit with feet flat on the floor, about hip-width apart.
- ✳ Lean forward to rest stomach on lap. Allow arms and head to hang near feet.
Hold for ____ seconds.
Do ____ repetitions.



Cat and Camel:

- ✳ Kneel on hands and knees.
- ✳ Arch back, letting head drop slightly.
Keep abdomen and buttock muscles tightened.
Hold for ____ seconds.
- ✳ Let back sag towards floor while keeping arms straight and weight evenly distributed between legs and arms.
Hold for ____ seconds. Do ____ repetitions.



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Partial Sit Up or Crunch:

- ✳ Lie on back with knees bent, feet flat on floor and arms crossed over chest.
- ✳ Using lower stomach muscles, raise head and shoulders slightly until shoulder blades are just off floor. (You may not be able to get up this far at first.)

Hold for ____ seconds. Relax.

Do ____ repetitions.



Other Care Information

The most effective treatment of your condition is a long-term regular exercise program, focused on increasing strength in your core muscles. Your health care provider may recommend exercises and stretches.