

## Exercises For Managing Acute Low Back Pain

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It was late in the afternoon and most of the furniture was already in the second floor apartment. All that was left was a small spinet piano. They had saved the toughest piece for last. Going up the first half of the stairs was only slightly difficult, but going up the second half there was a 90 degree turn and they needed to let the piano down to turn it. As they set it down it slipped back. He felt the strain in his low back and then the pain began.

This may sound familiar to some and for those people the feeling of helplessness that comes with acute low back pain can be overwhelming. The best advice I can offer my patients is to better understand their back pain and to try to take charge of their problem. Here

are some tried and proven tips for dealing with acute back pain:

### (1) Go to bed and stay there:

Most people feel that they can work out a back problem by getting up and moving around. Unfortunately most back injuries involve strained ligaments and putting weight on it is the last thing it needs. The analogy I use is you don't go jogging on a sprained ankle so stay off your sprained low back. The best position is flat on your back with your knees bent with a pillow under the knees. And above all, do not rest on that soft lumpy sofa, use the bed or the floor instead for more support.

### (2) Using ice versus heat:

The simple rule is for decreasing pain and inflammation use ice; for increasing blood supply and re-

laxing muscles use heat. My recommendation is when in doubt use cold treatments for 20 minutes every 2 hours to any new pain. Using heat can sometimes cause more inflammation and can actually aggravate a low back injury. So get out of the bath tub and take quick, hot showers and use cold treatments regularly.

### (3) How to exercise a sore back:

The patient with a sore low back must start off with exercises designed to stretch the spine and produce some mobility. The exercises help to relieve that achy feeling in the joints, relax tight muscles and free the joint up to move normally. A joint that can move normally is more likely to heal than one that is tight or what we refer to as "fixated".

### (4) Low back flexion Exercises:

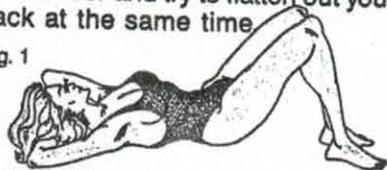
Start the exercises lying on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor.



#### EXERCISE ONE

From the starting position, lying on your back with feet on the floor lift your buttocks about an inch off the floor and try to flatten out your back at the same time

Fig. 1



1. This flat back position is referred to as "tucking" and is repeated throughout the exercises. Hold this position for a count of five and then relax. Repeat ten times.

Fig. 2



#### EXERCISE TWO

Use the same starting position and then bring one knee up and pull it towards your chest with your hands behind the knee. See Fig. 2

2. Do not strain or try to pull too hard. These exercises are not for working up a sweat! Hold for a count of five and then use the other leg, alternating back and forth. Do ten on each leg.

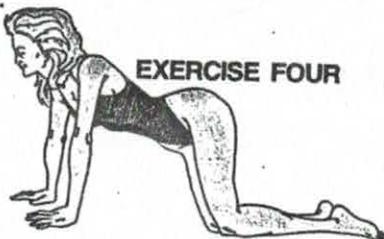
#### EXERCISE THREE

Fig. 3



Use the same starting position and this time pull both knees to your chest and raise your head at the same time. See figure 3. Hold for a count of five and relax. Once again this should feel comfortable to do and should not cause or increase your pain. Repeat this exercise ten times.

Fig. 4



#### EXERCISE FOUR

This exercise is different than the other three and is done with you on your hands and knees. Start with your back flat and then tuck your pelvis arching your back up like a

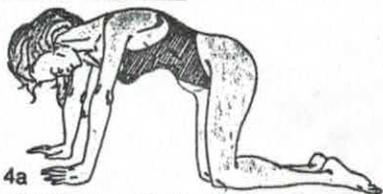


Fig. 4a

cat stretching its back. See figure 4a. Then rock back on your heels and try to feel a stretch in your low

Fig. 4b



back. See figure 4b. Hold this position for a count of five and then go back to the starting position with your back flat. Repeat this exercise ten times.

It is very important that when doing any exercise you follow this simple rule. "Listen" to your body and if you are having more pain during your stretching exercises you are either doing them wrong or your should not be doing them. One person may do very well with these exercises and another not as well and may need to have them modified.

If you are having a back problem, treat it with the respect that it deserves and consult the back pain professional of your choice. ■