

# General stretching and exercises for the back

## NORTH AMERICAN SPINE SOCIETY

### Exercises For A Healthy Back

**Use these simple exercises to keep your back in good shape.**

Regular aerobic and weight-bearing exercise (3-5 times per week) will improve your overall fitness and decrease the likelihood of back injury. If any of these exercises increases your back pain after five repetitions, or causes acute pain, you should stop doing it.

Follow these simple rules:

Do each exercise slowly.

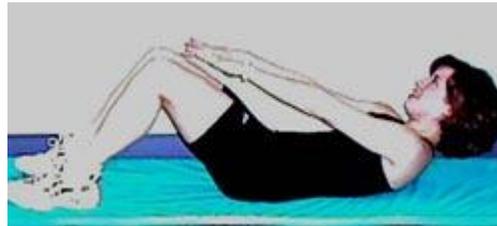
Do each exercise twice a day.

Start with five repetitions of each exercise, and work up to ten repetitions.

Always remember to begin and end your exercise session with stretching!

Consult your doctor before starting any exercise program.

**Modified Sit-up** - Strong abdominal muscles protect your back! Slowly raise your shoulders off the ground while keeping your chin tucked. Touch your fingertips to your knees and hold for the count of five. Do not arch your back.



**Straight Leg Raise**- This strengthens your legs and abdominal muscles. Lie on your back with one knee bent so the foot is flat on the floor; keep the other leg straight and slowly raise it 8" off the floor. Hold for five

seconds, lower and relax; repeat five times then change legs.

**Leg Lifts** - Lie on your right side (on the floor) with your right leg bent slightly. Stretch your right arm flat in front of you and use it for balance. Align your shoulder and hips. Slowly lift your left leg 8-10 inches then lower slowly. Repeat five times. Turn over and repeat on your left side, raising your right leg.



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**Neck Press** - This is an isometric exercise to strengthen your neck. Press your palm against your forehead, then use your neck muscles to push against your palm. Hold for ten seconds and repeat six times. Then press your palm against your temple and use your neck muscles to push against your palm, holding for ten seconds and repeating six times on each side. Then cup both hands behind your head and use your neck muscles to press back into your hands. Hold for ten seconds, and repeat six times.



**Isometric Abs** - This easy way to strengthen your stomach muscles can be done standing or sitting. Exhale and pull your abdominal muscles in as tightly as possible. Hold for five seconds then release; repeat ten times.

**Aerobic Exercise** - Aerobic exercise raises your heart rate with continuous, rhythmic movement and, done regularly, will increase your stamina and strengthen your heart and lungs. It should be done 3-5 times per week for at least 20 minutes. Walking is the best place to start, but bicycling, jogging and swimming are good options, too.

**Stretching** - Stretch throughout the day to keep your muscles flexible and avoid injury.



**Low Back Stretch:** Standing or lying flat on your back, slowly bring one knee toward your chest and grasp it with your hands. Hold for a count of three, then relax and repeat with the other leg.

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**Extension Stretch:** If you have been sitting or bent over for a while, simply stand, bend your knees slightly, place your hands on the back of your waist and stretch backward while looking at the ceiling. Hold for a count of five then slowly stand up.



**Neck Stretches:** Nod your head slowly forward, bringing your chin toward your chest. Repeat five times. Turn your head from side to side very slowly until you can align your chin with your shoulder. Repeat five times. Tilt your head slowly from side to side, bringing your ear over your shoulder. This is good if you spend a lot of time at a computer.



**Shoulder Rolls:** Roll your shoulders forward, then backward in a circle. Do this for 10-15 seconds to start. Begin with little circles and progress to large circles. Do this several times during the day to relieve tension. This is also good if you spend a lot of time at a computer.



## General stretching and exercises for the back



**Hamstring Stretch:** Stretching your hamstring muscle (which runs from the hip down the back of the thigh to the knee) gives your back and hip flexibility. It can be done standing, sitting or lying down. Standing - Stand with one leg straight out in front of you, your foot resting on a table or chair. Bend the leg you are standing on until you feel a mild stretch under the thigh of the raised leg. Hold for a count of three. Sitting - Sit on the floor with one leg straight in front of you, and the other bent with your foot flat on the floor. Lean forward slowly over the bent leg until you feel a mild stretch under the other thigh. Lying down - Lie on your back with your knees bent so your feet are flat on the floor. Raise one leg slowly, clasping your hands behind your knee to support it. Slowly straighten your leg and feel the stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold for a count of three then relax.

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