

Three of the best

Exercises to relax the spine

By Pia Maganov

Gentle exercises relax the spine and may reduce back pain

Hours sitting at a computer, driving your car, or playing video games add pressure to your spine. Your chest and neck muscles tighten while your shoulder and lower back muscles may weaken. The mix of strong and weak muscles can result in neck and back pain.

We all look forward to participating in activities such as sports and fitness programs, gardening, golf, outings with the family, and bike riding to name a few, without needing to worry about back pain.

A healthy back is flexible and strong. Gentle exercise is a great way to keep your back flexible and may reduce back pain. The exercises discussed here are to help ease the tension in your back by gently stretching the lower back muscles.

These three simple exercises will help keep your back flexible.

Seek Advice

Always seek advice from an appropriate health care professional or medical practitioner before attempting a new exercise program.

Before doing any of these exercises consider the cause of the back pain. If your back pain is as a result of recent trauma, injury or surgery these exercises may not be suitable for your condition, please seek the advice of your health care professional before using these exercises. First aid treatment such as R.I.C.E. (rest, ice, compression and elevation) may be more appropriate.

Do not do these exercises if you are on medication that reduces pain or swelling such as aspirin, paracetamol or anti-inflammatories. These medications may mask your body's natural warning mechanisms and you may not be aware of movements that will aggravate your condition.

Important - Please read this section before starting this program

Back pain can be the result of a myriad of activities in your life. It should not be ignored. Take into consideration what is suitable for your back and your situation at all times. Inappropriate exercises or stretches could cause more damage and increase the pain and must be avoided.

When in pain we often seek quick fixes to stop the pain so we can get on with what we had planned. Pain is a way of our body tells us something is wrong. If ignored the situation could get worse.

Before embarking on any exercise program be prepared to pay attention to how your back feels when doing the movements. If the pain increases or if the exercise just does not feel right, do not continue to do it.

Let's start

I have used lots of words to describe these exercises. This is on purpose. All too often we think of exercises as fast and vigorous and we expect instant results. The words are for you to slow down and understand the purpose of the exercise. The exercises *will* help your back and you should feel pretty good after doing them, but *only if you do the exercises with care*.

All these exercises are performed on the floor lying on your back. If it is uncomfortable for you to get on to the floor, you could use a firm bed. A soft bed is not suitable. If lying on your back causes more pain, return to a position that is comfortable to you and do not continue with these exercises.

How to approach to these exercises

Go slowly, perhaps the slowest you have ever moved.

Go gently, allow yourself to be aware of the effects of the movement.

As you focus on the movement, be calm, breathe deeply and purposely to release tension from all over the body.

Take a moment to read the whole exercise description before starting the exercise.

To help reduce discomfort in the back, it is important to relax the whole body. Be aware of any pain and consciously try to relax the muscles around that area. If the pain persists or increases, stop doing the exercise.

Exercise 1: Hip rolls:

This exercise introduces gentle movement to the lower back.

The key to this exercise is “less is best”. Keep your movements within a comfortable range of movement. Please take a gentle and patient approach to this exercise.

The key points that make all the difference:

- Positioning the back before you start: ensure you have a slight arch in your back even when your knees are bent up.
- Move the knees only a small way side to side.
- Breathing calmly while doing the movement. Allow the breath and the slow movement to calm the body.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Imagine the movement is massaging the back of the hips.

The exercise

1. Lie on your back, arms slightly out from the body, legs bent, feet slightly apart (about 10 cm) and flat on the floor. Use your inner thigh muscles to lightly hold your knees together.
2. Think of a clock face. Keep your range of movement small, slow and controlled. Breathe in as you gently move your knees to one side stopping at 1 o'clock.

Do NOT try to put your knees on the floor, or swing your hips, as this will over-twist the spine. “Less is best”. What we are trying to achieve is a gentle stretch and massage of the lower back muscles.

3. Breathe out as you move your knees back to 12 o’clock.
4. Breathe in as you slowly, and with control move your knees to 11 o’clock.
5. Breathe out as you move your knees back to 12 o’clock.
6. Maintaining the breathing pattern and controlled, gentle movements, take the knees slowly in both directions about 5 times.



Exercise 2: Knee hug

It is a good idea to have a cushion under your head for this exercise.

This exercise is not a flexibility exercise. You are stretching your back, using the weight of your legs. Your hips should always be on the floor.

The exercise

1. Lie on your back with your legs stretched out along the floor. Your buttocks should feel heavy, pressing into the floor.
2. Slowly bend one knee to put your foot flat on the floor without letting your hips move.
3. Slowly bend the other knee to put that foot flat on the floor.

Your knees and feet should be about hip width apart. Imagine all your body weight sinking into your hips where your legs join your torso. The hips should feel heavy. There may be a slight arch in your lower back. Let your rib cage relax so that the ribs are resting on the floor (not arched up off the floor).

4. Being aware that you are keeping your back in contact with the floor, slowly, one at a time, bring each knee towards your chest.

This exercise is NOT about how far you can get our knee to your chest, rather how long you can make you back feel when the feet are off the floor. Take a loose hold over your knees by resting the right hand on the right knee and the left hand on the left knee. Do not grab both hands. Keep as much of your back on the floor as possible.

This is the knee hug position – a soft tuck of the knees and a light touch of the hands on the knees. As your back and stomach muscles relax you may feel that more of your back is making contact with the floor. This is a good thing.

5. Stay in this position for about a minute if it feels comfortable. Breathe freely, thinking about your breath slowing. Imagine the weight of the legs encouraging your back muscles to relax and stretch.
6. To release the position, slowly take one foot to the floor. Wait a moment and then take the other foot to the floor.
7. A repeat of the Hip Roll exercise can be beneficial after this strong stretch.



An optional addition to this exercise: When in the knee hug position, you may like to make small slow, gentle, circular movement across the hip area. Do 5 careful circles in one direction and then 5 in the other direction.

Exercise 3: Leg stretch

Start this exercise as you did the Knee Hug exercise. Lie on your back with a pillow under your head, legs stretched out. Imagine all your body weight sinking into your hips where your legs join your torso. There may be a slight arch in your lower back. Let your rib cage relax so that the ribs are resting on the floor (not arched up off the floor).

The exercise

1. Lie on your back with your legs stretched out along the floor. Your buttocks should feel heavy, pressing into the floor.
2. Holding your stomach muscles in lightly and without letting your hips move, slowly bend one knee to put your foot flat on the floor.
3. Similarly, slowly bend the other knee to put that foot flat on the floor.
4. Holding your stomach muscles in lightly, slowly bring one knee towards the shoulder and hold it loosely with both hands.
5. Straighten the other leg as if pushing it away. It will help keep your back and hips in position. Be aware that your weight remains in your hips and that there is a slight arch in your lower back.
6. Gently hug the knee with both hands while the other leg stretches out along the floor. Keep the stretched leg stretching. DO NOT allow it to relax and go floppy, unless there is back pain. I liken this exercise to being in “traction”. The leg stretched out is keeping the hips and back stretching.
7. Breathing deeply and staying relaxed, keep the stretched leg stretching and focus on the spine getting longer. Hold this position for about a minute if your back will allow it.
8. To release this position slowly bring the out-stretch leg back to the bent knee position first, then return the tucked leg to the same bent knee position.

9. Repeat this stretch on the other leg.
10. Repeat on both legs.



Congratulations! You have complete three of the best exercises to gently relax and stretch your back.

These exercises are basic exercises to help you keep you back flexible and to reduce tension.

To assist you to strengthen your back muscles, we have created the BACpillow. The BACpillow – Back, Abs, Core pillow, help your upper back and neck relax and places your back in the ideal position to strength and tone the lower back and lower abdominal muscles. The stronger these muscles are, the better protected your spins is from injury and strain.

For more information about the BACpillow please go to our website:
www.bacpillow.com.au

About the BACpillow

It's about feeling fit and strong and alive. Turn your back on pack pain. The BACpillow is designed so that when you lie on it you know you are getting the best results. Do your core exercises and you can feel the muscles working the way

they are meant to. Your neck is supported; your back well positioned. The pillow is comfortable to lie on and places your spine in the best alignment for working your core muscles. With some simple yet very effective exercises, you do the rest.

As an added benefit your stomach muscles tone. No more tummy hanging out over the top of your jeans. Imagine how great you will look!



For more information about the BACpillow please go to our website:
www.bacpillow.com

Get one today click here: <http://www.bacpillow.com.au/buy-now/>

About the Author

Pia Maganov has been in the fitness industry for over 10 years. She is a personal trainer and Pilates instructor in Melbourne, Australia. Her approach to exercise follows the Pilates principles of control, concentration, centering, precision, breath and flow. Many of her clients have been with her for 10 years. She has helped people improve many physical conditions including eliminating back pain, rehabilitation from falls and shoulder injuries, improving neck alignment and posture by reducing kyphosis, strengthening ankles and knees, and getting your body to be the best it can be.

She enjoys working with people to help them strengthen their core muscles. She believes looking after your body allows you freedom to do the things you enjoy.