

EXERCISES FOR A HAPPY BACK

It's estimated that 80 percent of all Americans will develop low back pain at some point in their lives. It's one of the most common reasons people see their health care providers and the most common condition treated with physical therapy. To avoid back pain, it's important to stretch and strengthen the muscles in your back and core. Here are three to get you started.

Bridge exercise



1. Starting in the same position as the knee-to-chest stretch, tighten your abdominal and gluteal muscles.



2. Raise your hips to form a straight line from your knees to your shoulders.
3. Take three deep breaths



4. Return to the starting position.
5. Repeat.
6. Start with five repetitions each day and gradually work up to 30.

Seated lower back rotational stretch



1. Sit on an armless chair or a stool. Cross your left leg over your right leg.
2. Bracing your right elbow against the outside of your left knee, twist and stretch to the side. Hold for 10 seconds.
3. Repeat on the opposite side.
4. Repeat this stretch three to five times on each side twice a day.

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Knee-to-chest stretch



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.



2. Using both hands, pull up one knee and press it to your chest. Tighten your abdominals and press your spine to the floor. Hold for five seconds.



3. Return to the starting position.
4. Repeat step 2 with the opposite leg.



5. Return to the starting position.
6. Repeat with both legs at the same time. Repeat each stretch two to three times — preferably once in the morning and once at night.