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JENNIFER NICOLE LEE

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WORKING OUT THE KINKS

A conservative approach to relieving back pain with exercises that build muscle strength in all the right places.

By John Platero, CPT, RTS

The phrase "back pain" can be a catch-all term for a number of causes, from degenerative or mechanical disc herniation, sciatica, central or lateral stenosis to weak abdominals and tight hip flexors. If you have back pain, consult a physician, chiropractor and a physical therapist before you start any kind of exercise training program.

This article presents a conservative approach to improving the musculature that assists in supporting your pelvis and vertebral column. The goal is to strengthen all the muscles that might affect these areas to help support the back. Start with one set and progress to two or three sets.

Remember, this is not a bodybuilding routine. It's to be done slowly and controlled. If any of these exercises cause pain, immediately stop and consult a doctor. ▶▶

DEAD BUG

Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor and lower back pushed to the floor. Keeping your arms straight, slowly raise one arm behind your head, then switch arms. If there is no pain, lift one leg followed "in time" with the opposite arm behind your head. If there is no pain, lift both arms and both legs off the ground like a dead bug dying of a dose of Raid bug spray. Hold that position for up to two minutes. The key is to keep the abdominals tight so your back stays pressed against the floor.



For additional exercises like the ones mentioned in this article, please call (800) 778-6060 or visit www.NCCPT.com.

BRIDGING

In the same starting position as the dead bug: raise hips one inch off the ground, keep them level for 10 seconds then return to floor. If there is no pain, raise hips as high as you can while maintaining a level pelvis for 10 seconds, then return back to the floor. If still no pain, lift the hips again and extend one leg and hold for 10 seconds. Now switch legs. If you can't keep your pelvis level when extending the leg, lower your pelvis a little, tighten your abs and try again. It's very important to keep the pelvis level. Think slow motion. Once you're proficient, progress to a stability ball following the same progression.



Photos by Cathy Alonso

PUSH-UP-PIKE

In a push-up position, place the ball under your shins or feet, tighten the abs, draw the ball with your shins or feet towards your head, return to the start position and then perform a push-up. Repeat up to 20 repetitions.



PRAYER

Kneel on the floor with your forearms on the ball in a prayer position. Keep your abdominals tight and slowly roll the ball forward keeping your forearms on the ball. Don't allow your lower back to arch. Keep the abdominals tight.



WALL SLIDES

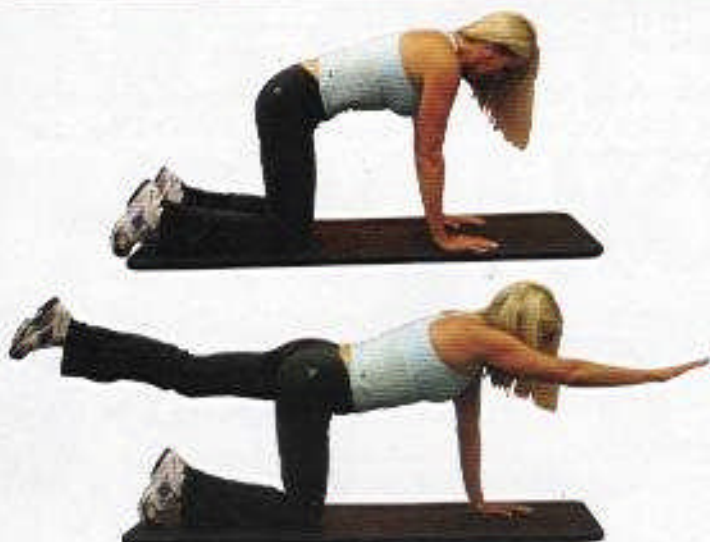
Place a ball behind your lower back against the wall, with legs shoulder width apart. Draw in your abdominals and gently roll down the ball into a sitting position and hold for a count of 10 seconds. Keep the back flat and supported against the ball. Progress to 30 reps and then add a light weight.

ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION'S FACTS ON BACK PAIN

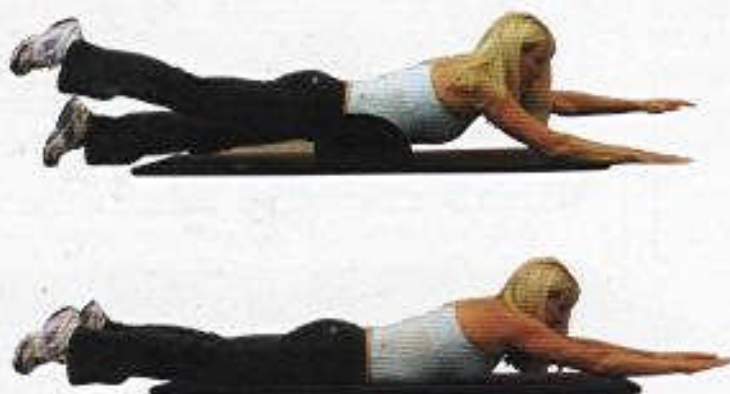
- Back pain affects 50 to 80 percent of people in the U.S. at some point in their lives.
- In any given year, 10 percent of adults experience back pain or other symptoms, such as limited mobility or stiffness.
- Each year, Americans spend an estimated \$24 billion on treatments for back pain.
- Back pain can last for a few short days or can linger for weeks, months and even years.
- Arthritis is a common form of back pain. The earlier arthritis is diagnosed, the more steps can be taken to reduce disability in the future.
- Other factors that aggravate back pain include suffering from stress, not getting enough sleep, being overweight and having poor posture or not being physically fit.
- Back pain should not be considered a normal part of aging; it is a chronic condition that calls for similar lifestyle changes as diseases like arthritis and diabetes do.

QUADRUPED

In an all-fours position with the wrists under the shoulders and knees under hips, tighten the abdominals and slowly imagine someone were sliding a piece of paper under your hand. Only lift the hand slightly. Follow this with the knees, then alternate arms and legs, followed by extending alternating arms and legs. Hold for 10 seconds. Do not allow your body to tilt when lifting or extending either your arms and/or legs off the ground. Be careful not to arch your lower back when extending your legs.



SUPERMAN



Because the prone position (lying face down) may be painful in certain back conditions, you might begin with a pillow under the belly button to prevent any pain. Forcefully tighten your abdominals and follow the same progression as the dead bug. Start with one arm, alternate, progress to single leg, alternate, and then integrate alternating arms and legs, finally holding both arms and legs off the ground. Hold each movement for a count of 10. You may progress to a stability ball.

ROWING

Lying face down with the ball under your abdomen pick a light set of dumbbells of three to eight pounds. Keeping the abdominals tight and the elbows out to the side at a 90-degree angle, row, pinching the shoulder blades together at the top of the motion. Hold for three seconds at the top of the motion. Perform 20 to 30 repetitions.

