

## **Why Exercise If You Have Low Back Pain**

The single most effective therapy for many types of chronic low back pain is exercise. To most people, the notion of exercise for back pain is a catch 22. Most people have been told that regular exercise will improve their low back pain, but they feel they can't exercise because of the pain.

### **Why Exercise?**

Exercise improves your overall appearance and general health, which is important for those feeling sick due to pain. Second, strengthening the supporting muscles around the spine improves your weight distribution and posture. Third, moving the back itself helps improve circulation in the back, allowing faster healing of damaged areas, and allowing medications to get into the area they need to be in to help relieve the pain. Fourth, flexibility improves, decreasing the change of further injury. The benefits of exercise has been confirmed by many studies, which show dramatic improvements of low back pain in individuals who are physically fit. In addition, the person in good physical shape is much less likely than the average person to injure their back during work or daily activities.

### **What types of Exercise?**

The benefit of exercise for your low back depends on three key principles. First, you must attain satisfactory aerobic fitness. Second, you should focus part of your work-out on the muscle groups that support your back. Third, you must avoid exercises that place excessive stresses on your back.

#### **Stretch, Stretch and Stretch Again**

A significant part of your work-out should stretch the muscles of your low back, abdomen, pelvis and thighs. This helps reduce muscle spasm in the long run. Flexibility in these areas will also greatly decrease the chance of further injury to the back.

#### **30 Minutes of Aerobic Activity**

The ideal aerobic exercise involves the large muscle groups of your body (arms and legs) in a smooth, cyclical fashion. Recommended exercises include swimming, fast walking, cycling, and using a ski machine or elliptical exerciser. You should achieve the appropriate heart rate for 30 minutes at least three times per week. Of course, you should consult your physician and review your aerobic program before getting started. He/she can give you the appropriate target for your heart rate during aerobic exercise. It is always optimal to approach your aerobic goals slowly, especially if you have not recently worked-out. Focus on the abdomen and muscles that support your back. By strengthening these muscle groups, the body's weight distribution and posture are improved, resulting in less stress on the low back. It is best to perform these exercises after a good "warm-up", such as your aerobic routine. Ask your physical therapist for instructions on specific stretching and strengthening exercises for these areas.

## **What not to do**

While the merits of good conditioning cannot be overstated, the wrong type of exercise may actually worsen your low back problem. Activities that impart excessive stress on the back such, as lifting heavy weights, squatting, and climbing are not advised. In addition, high impact exercises such as running, jumping, and step aerobics can aggravate a low back condition. When walking, wear well-cushioned shoes with good arch supports and use a treadmill or a track made for athletics. Cycling on a recumbent stationary bike can relieve stress on the back.

## **Avoiding the Catch-22**

Typically, stretching and exercise will increase your pain initially. This is where the pain specialist can help, by providing medications, nerve block and other techniques to help you get over the initial hump and on your way to recovery.

With the help of your pain physician and physical therapist, you can help yourself get control of pain. See the staff at Newport Pain Management for help. For more information go to <http://www.newportpain.com>