

Acute Low Back Pain

Initial Exercise Program (part 1)



Single Knee to Chest

(purpose: stretch the low back and gluts, bring the pelvis into a posterior tilt)

Lift one knee towards the chest keeping the other knee bent as shown. Using your hands, gently pull the knee closer to your chest. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times, 3 times per day.



Double Knee to Chest

(purpose: progression of Single Knee to Chest)

Lift both knees towards the chest as shown. Using your hands, gently pull the knees closer to your chest. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times, 3 times per day.



Posterior Pelvic Tilt (with or without ball)

(purpose: postural awareness/pelvic awareness, strengthen lumbar intrinsic muscles)

Lying with your knees bent up as shown, gently press the small of your back to the floor (think of a dog tucking their tail). **OPTIONAL:** at the same time, gently squeeze a ball or pillow between your knees. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 2 sets of 10, 2 times per day.

Tip: Placing your hand under the small of your back while pushing down (attempting to press your hand down) can help assure that you are doing this correctly.

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Initial Exercise Program (part 2)



Sidelying Clams

(purpose: Strengthen the gluts)

Lying on your side with your knees bent as shown, slowly lift your top knee. Stop when you feel your pelvis begin to roll back. Slowly lower the knee.



Tips: begin with a pillow between the knees if pain is present without. Instruct patient to put their top hand on their top hip to monitor for pelvic movement.

Repeat 2 sets of 10, 2 times per day.



Cat & Camel Stretch

(purpose: strength the lower and middle back, increase postural awareness)

In a quadrupedal (crawling) position, hunch your upper back toward the ceiling (like an angry cat). Hold for 30 seconds. Then sag your back toward the ground, holding for another 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times, 3 times per day.



Prone Press-up

(purpose: stretch the low back into extension, reduce strain on certain parts of the spine)

Lying on your stomach, place your hands flat on the floor under your shoulders, and push up. Keep your pelvis tight to the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Monitor for wrist pain. If you begin having pain or numbness in your legs, or if this worsens with this exercise, please stop and consult your care provider.

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Initial Exercise Program (part 3)



Piriformis Stretch with a Swiss Ball (Preferred)

(purpose: stretch the piriformis and gluts. This method is gentler than when performed without the Swiss ball)

Lying on your back, place one leg up on the ball with the knee bent as shown in the picture. Cross the other leg over, so the outside of the ankle is resting just above the knee. Slowly roll the ball up towards your buttocks until a mild stretch is felt in your buttocks./gluts. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times, 3 times per day.



Piriformis Stretch without a Swiss Ball

(purpose: stretch the piriformis and gluts)

Lying on your back, with both knees bent and your feet resting on the floor, cross one leg over the other so the outside of the ankle is resting just above the knee. Using your hands, gently pull the bottom thigh up towards your chest until a gentle mild stretch is felt in your buttocks/gluts. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times, 3 times per day.

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Strengthening Part 2



Alternate Arm & Leg Raises in Quadruped

(purpose: core strengthening, increased postural awareness)

On all fours, as shown, gently tighten the muscles around your belly button, then lift one arm and the opposite leg until they are horizontal to the floor. Do not let your back arch. Hold 5 seconds, then alternate to the other arm/leg. Repeat 15 times, 2 times per day.



Fire Hydrant

(purpose: hip and core strengthening)

On all fours, as shown, gently tighten the muscles around your belly button, then lift one knee to the side, keeping it bent. Do not let your body tilt to the side. Repeat 10-15 times, 2 times per day.



Posterior Pelvic Tilt with Resisted Hip Flexion

(purpose: core strengthening)

Lying with your knees bent up as shown, lift one knee until the thigh is perpendicular with the floor. The knee should be bent to 90 degrees, as shown. Flatten your back to the floor (see posterior pelvic tilt exercise). Using one or both hands, provide resistance just above the knee, pushing up with the knee and down with your hand. Do not allow the thigh to move.

Hold for 5 seconds. Alternate sides. Repeat 15 times per side, 2 times per day.

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Posture & Body Mechanics Quick Sheet



Standing Posture Self-Check

(Purpose: increase self body-awareness, improve posture)

Stand with your back to a wall, about one foot away. Then step back until the back of your heels touch the wall. Bring your heels, buttocks, as well as head and upper back to the wall without tilting your head up. Hold for 30 seconds.

Take one step forward, holding this position. This is ideal standing posture. It is helpful to use a mirror for this exercise.



Position of Comfort

(purpose: relax the back muscles, more out of an anterior tilt with relaxation)

This position can be utilized when it reduces pain. You can use a chair, a swiss ball, a couch, etc.



Lifting (Lift with your Legs!)

(purpose: to keep the gluts and abdominals engaged while lifting)

- Use a wide base of support (feet should be shoulder distance apart)
- Bend your knees
- **Keep your back straight**
- As you stand upright, push your heels into the ground and tighten your buttocks
- Keep the object as close to your body as possible

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Posture & Sleep



Seated Posture Self-Check

(Purpose: decrease pain and strain on the low back while sitting)

- Feet resting flat on the floor
- Knees bent to 90 degrees
- Back should maintain a neutral/straight position
- Chin tucked
- Stand up every 15 minutes (set a timer on your phone!)



Sleep Positioning—Position of comfort

(purpose: improve sleep)

Most people with back pain sleep best on their side, however, lying on your back is ok also. When **lying on your side**, one hip should be directly on top of the other, the knees should be bent and aligned with one another, and the ankles should be aligned. A pillow should be used between the knees.



When **lying on your back**, a pillow should be used under the knees to reduce the tendency of your back to arch.

Although lying on your stomach for short periods of time can be beneficial, sleeping on your stomach is generally not recommended due to the strain this places on the cervical spine. If this is your position of comfort, refer to your care provider for details on reducing cervical strain.

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