

Body Mind Yoga
Information Sheet and home practice

Lower back

Lower back pain can be caused by a number of different things. It may be an injury to the spine or muscles, it may be caused by tightness in the leg, lower back or hip flexor muscles, or it can be caused through weak muscles in the legs, abdominals or lower back. The following exercises help to stretch and strengthen the muscles around the lower back.

If lower back pain is strong and/or persistent or there has been an injury, it is advisable to see an osteopath, physiotherapist or chiropractor for assessment. It is not always appropriate to do yoga – at least until the condition has settled down. Yoga is certainly a good preventative and can keep mild conditions in check, but anything more serious should be looked at first.

Note: Always do the exercises slowly and gently. Listen to your body, never push into pain and remember to breathe.

LYING DOWN

1. **Knees side to side:** Have the legs in semi supine, knees bent with the feet flat on the floor and about shoulder width apart. Bring the arms out wide into cross position. As you breathe out, slowly take your knees down to one side; as you breathe in, come back to the centre and then breathe out to the other side...continue from side to side like that.
2. **Circling knees over the chest:** Bring the knees up above the chest and hold onto them with the hands and slowly guide the knees in circles over the chest so that you make circles on the floor with the lower back...go in both directions.
3. **Lifting the head:** Start by breathing out and pressing your lower back to the floor; then breathing in and arching your lower back away from the floor, tilting pelvis back and forth...then as you exhale and press the lower back to the floor, lift the head up. Put the head down as you breathe in...you can go further by drawing the knees over the chest as you lift the head up.
4. **Lifting hips up and down:** Remain in semi supine, but have the feet about hip width apart. Breathe out as you press into the floor with the feet, tighten the buttocks and lift the hips up a little; inhale back down. If that's fine for your lower back then gradually lift the hips up higher and higher...then once the hips are back down you can lift the head and feet again (as in No.3) and then alternate between lifting the hips up and down and lifting the head and feet.

5. **Sciatic release:** From semi supine, bring the right knee over the chest and hold underneath with the right hand. Have the left hand behind the head. As you breathe out slowly straighten the right leg up toward the ceiling as you lift the head up; breathe in back down...go up and down a few times then swap sides.
6. **Circling leg:** Have the right knee over the chest again and hold under the knee with both hands. Lift the foot up toward the ceiling so the leg is comfortably straight and use the hands to slowly circle the leg as you breathe easily. Go first in one direction and then the other...swap legs.
7. **Knees over the chest and rocking from side to side:** Hold onto the knees with the hands and take them slightly side to side...then have the hands on the insides of the knees and press the knees wide apart and roll side to side like that...bring knees together and draw them in and out of the chest a few times.
8. **Double leg lifts:** Have legs in semi supine with feet and knees close together. Arms can either be beside you or hands tucked under the buttocks for support. As you breathe out slowly lift the feet off the floor, straighten the legs toward the ceiling as you pull the tummy in. Breathe in, back down...if that's easy and you don't have a lower back problem, then keep the legs straight for the whole movement.

STANDING

9. **Pushing ankles and knees away from each other:** Stand with your feet close together (inch or two apart) and have your arms relaxed beside you. Breathe in and push your ankles and knees away from each other (keeping your feet where they are). Hold that tightness for a second or two before breathing out and relaxing. Repeat 5 more times...shake legs out.
10. **Cleansing breath:** Inhale. Float arms up above head; exhale down, bend the knees and lean forward from the waist. Go up and down like that...then hold leaning forward from the waist and breathe...keeping your chin tucked in, slowly roll back up to standing, bringing the head up last.

LYING DOWN

11. **Resting on your back and circling knees over the chest:** Then take 1-5 minutes to lie there as you breathe in and expand the belly; breathe out and relax your whole body.