Bye-Bye, Backache

Kimberly Garrison demonstrates four exercises to send that pain packing.

November 29, 2007 By Kimberly Garrison

Does your back hurt? If so, join the 80 percent of Americans who suffer from back pain at some point in their lives. Causes include herniated disks, stenosis (narrowing of the spine, compressing nerves), scoliosis (curving of the spine), spondylitis (spinal arthritis) and tumors—and plain old stress and strain. Another common cause: 65 percent of adult Americans are overweight, making spines tote extra cargo. To prevent, treat and even reverse back pain, stay as fit and lean as you can. But even if you're overweight or out of shape, you can use these simple exercises to ease back pain. Begin slowly, working up to the repetitions listed.

1. **Sit (or stand) up straight:** Follow your mama's advice. Maintaining good posture lengthens and straightens your spine, preventing pressure on the nerves. This works when you're in a chair, too (with both feet squarely on the floor).
2. **Superman pose:** Lie face down on the floor with your arms stretched out directly overhead. Pressing your belly into the floor, raise your arms, chest and legs and hold for a few seconds. Squeeze muscles, lower arms, chest and legs to floor and repeat. Do 12 to 15 repetitions, two or three sets.
3. **Body-weight lat pull-down:** Sit in an armless chair (or on an exercise ball) with both feet on the floor. Roll a towel lengthwise and grab the ends, using an overhand grip. Lift the towel overhead, then lower it slowly toward your chest while simultaneously squeezing your shoulder blades down and back. Once your elbows reach your waist, return to the starting position and repeat 12 to 15 times for two or three sets.
4. **Cobra:** This classic yoga exercise strengthens the muscles all along the spine. Lie face down with legs extended and toes pointed; arms bent at the elbows; forearms, palms and forehead on the floor. Press butt muscles, legs and feet down into the floor; slowly lift head, elbows and chest while simultaneously rolling the shoulders back and down. Do 12 to 15 repetitions for two or three sets.

IT'S SPINE TINGLING

40% the increased likelihood of back surgeries performed in the U.S. compared to other countries
Source: ABC News

5 back treatments you may not know about

1. Alexander Technique teaches you to reduce muscle overuse and regain control over your body's posture; alexandertechnique.com
2. Biofeedback is relaxation training and behavior modification that can help alleviate the impact of

stress on your spine; mayoclinic.com/health/biofeedback/SA00083

3. Biomagnet therapy is a non-invasive and drug-free approach that may help increase circulation and decrease pain; pulse-magnetic-therapy.com/medicine.php
4. Rolfing is deep-tissue bodywork that realigns muscles, restoring them to their correct shape and position; rolf.org
5. Acupuncture and acupressure stimulate pressure points with needles or fingers to relieve pain and restore health; medicalacupuncture.org and spineuniverse.com/display article.php/article785.html

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