

FREEDOM FROM BACK PAIN

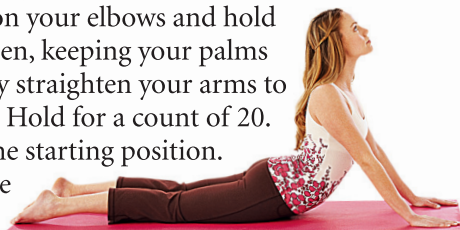
New science reveals that a few simple moves can bring relief—even when prescription meds fail

Fully 84 percent of women will suffer with serious lower-back pain at some point in their lives, reveal scientists at Canada's University of Saskatchewan. Common habits such as lifting heavy packages and sitting in unsupportive chairs can cause the spine's shock-absorbing *intervertebral disks* to shift and put pressure on nearby nerves, explains Howard Liss, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of rehabilitation medicine at Columbia University. The good news: Unlike pain-killing drugs—which only mask the problem—these easy exercises beat back pain at its source *and* prevent recurrence.



TO EASE DISCOMFORT QUICKLY

The backward arch: “This move helps counteract the unwelcome effects of gravity, extending the spine to its full length and giving crowded disks the space they need to move away from nerves,” explains Dr. Liss. “When performed regularly, it can significantly reduce pain in one week or less.” **To do:** Start by lying on your belly, placing a few pillows under your chest for comfort, if desired. Prop yourself up on your elbows and hold for 30 seconds. Then, keeping your palms on the floor, slowly straighten your arms to elevate your chest. Hold for a count of 20. Slowly return to the starting position. Repeat three to five times daily.



The torso twist: “Chronically tight muscles in the lower back can pull vertebrae closer together, compressing the intervening disks,” explains Dr. Liss. “This slow gentle rotation loosens those problematic muscles and promotes long-term flexibility and strength.” **To do:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together on the floor. Drop both knees to the right and turn your head to the left, keeping your shoulders and back flat on the floor. Hold for 20 seconds. Switch legs and head to the opposite sides. Repeat, twisting to each side 10 times. For best results, do three to five sets daily.



TO PREVENT PAINFUL FLARE-UPS

The hamstring stretch: “Many women have tightness in the hamstring muscles at the back of each thigh,” says Dr. Liss. “Over time this can force the back to flex, leading to misalignment.” He recommends this preventive stretch. **To do:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and hands on the back of your right thigh (above the knee) for support. Slowly straighten your right leg until you feel a pulling sensation at the back of the thigh. Keep your back flat on the floor; hold for 20 seconds. Return to the starting position. Repeat with your left leg. Do three sets twice daily.



The quickie crunch: “Just two sets of crunches a day can strengthen the core muscles surrounding the lower back,” maintains Dr. Liss. “This stabilizes the spine and reduces stress on the disks.” **To do:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together on the floor. Cross your arms over your chest, then contract your ab muscles and lift your torso, rising no more than 45 degrees. Hold for 4 seconds, then return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times. Do two sets daily. (To make the exercise easier, place your feet hip-width apart and lightly grip behind your knees.)



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