

10-, 20-, and 30-minute sequences for easing back pain

By Andrea Ferretti

LOW-BACK PAIN hits most of us at some point. It can be caused by injury, poor posture, repetitive motion, or simply aging—the soft discs between vertebrae dry over time, and less-supple discs can be more susceptible to bulging or rupture and put pressure on nerves, sending red-hot pain signals to your brain. But while getting older is inevitable, pain is not: Experts agree that routine stretching can both prevent and relieve symptoms. When your spine and pelvis are aligned and your muscles are relaxed, you can be more resilient. Use these poses to ease tension in your back, as well as in the hips, hamstrings, and inner legs, which can affect your posture and lower spine.

Practice tip

Whether your back pain is acute or chronic, talk to your doctor before you start any new exercise routine. Then approach this sequence as a form of self-care: Go easy, soothing your nerves, mind, and body. Use deep, fluid breaths to move from pose to pose. If you feel any strain in your lower back, reduce your range of motion or skip the pose.

If you have 10 minutes, try this practice.



5 rounds,
2 breaths each,
1 minute total



Ardha Apanasana Half Knees-to-Chest Pose

Lie on your back. On an exhalation, draw your right knee toward your chest and hold your right shin with both hands. In this and the following 4 poses, do not press your lower back to the floor; instead, maintain a natural lumbar curve. Slowly inhale to release the right leg back to the floor, then exhale to draw in the left knee; inhale to release. Repeat, alternating right and left, 4 more times.

5 breaths,
30 seconds,
each side



Supta Padangusthasana A Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose A

Slide a hand under your lower back to make sure there is a gentle curve. Place a strap around the arch of your right foot. Exhale to straighten your right leg, stacking your ankle over your hip, or bringing your leg up as high as possible and slackening the strap as needed to feel a gentle hamstring stretch. Press through both heels, flexing your feet. Exhale to release and switch sides.

5 breaths,
30 seconds,
each side



Supta Padangusthasana B Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose B

Return to your right side and take both strap ends in your right hand, extending your left arm along the floor. Exhale to lower your right leg to the right. Try to keep your left hip on the floor and your left kneecap pointing up. You should feel a stretch in your inner right thigh, but no lower-back strain. Inhale to lift your right leg back up; exhale to release it to the floor. Switch sides.

5 breaths,
30 seconds,
each side



Supta Padangusthasana C Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose C

Inhale to bring your right leg back to vertical. With the strap around the arch of your foot, bring both ends into your left hand. Place your right thumb into your right hip crease and draw your hip down slightly so that you maintain length and space in the lower back. Exhale to draw your leg left across your body; inhale to bring your leg back to vertical. Release the strap and switch legs.

8–10 breaths,
1 minute,
each side



Sucirandhrasana Eye-of-the-Needle Pose

Bring both knees in toward your chest, then place your right ankle on your left thigh, just above the knee. Hold your left thigh. If you want to increase the stretch, bring your left thigh forward and press your right knee away from your torso. Be mindful of the natural curve in your lower back and keep your shoulders relaxed. Exhale to release, then switch sides. After finishing on the left, roll to one side and use your hands to come to a seated position.

PHOTOS: RICK CUMMINGS; MODEL: MATT KAPINUS; STYLIST: EMILY CHOI; HAIR/MAKEUP: BETH WALKER; TOP: FILA; BOTTOMS: MPG

End here with Savasana 4 minutes
OR, HAVE 10 MORE MINUTES? TURN TO PAGE 56 TO EXTEND YOUR SEQUENCE.