

# PREVENTION HEAD TO TOE

## Preventing Back Pain or Injury – Part II

**Do you want to prevent back pain? Exercise is one of the most effective ways of preventing and treating recurring or chronic back pain.**

Weak core muscles are often at the root of lower back pain. The muscles of the back, the abdomen, hips and buttocks are all part of the core muscles. The core muscles are the spine's main defense against gravity. Exercises to increase strength, endurance and coordination of the core muscles improve core stability. Improving core stability reduces the risk of injury to the spinal joints, discs, back muscles and ligaments during such activities as walking, running, lifting, exercising, etc.

Stretching shortened muscles that are pulling the spine out of alignment can also relieve lower back pain. Try a few basic exercises to stretch and strengthen your back and supporting muscles. Repeat each exercise a few times, then increase the number of repetitions as the exercise gets easier. If you've **ever** hurt your back, have **any** present back discomfort or have other health conditions, such as osteoporosis, consult your doctor before doing these exercises. Before doing any stretches, warm the muscles up with a 5 to 10 minute brisk walk. Warm muscles are easier to stretch. You should never feel pain with any of these activities. If you do, do not push so hard, or discontinue.

### **Back Stretches:**

#### **Cat Stretch and Slump Stretch**



B. On all fours on the floor, start with a neutral back (back has normal curve to it).



C. Arch your back as high as possible and hold for 10-30 seconds. Return to neutral position and relax.



A. Slump your back as if trying to get your navel to the floor. Hold for 10-30 seconds. Return to neutral position and relax. Repeat stretches 3 times (work up to 5-6 times).

#### **Low Back Stretch**



A. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.



B. Bring your knees up to your chest and use your arms to pull them in toward the chest. Hold for a couple seconds and then try to go deeper. Do not push to the point of pain. Hold for 10-30 seconds. Repeat one time.

Variations: You can grab your legs under the knees on the back of the thigh. Or you can also pull one leg in at a time.

## Lumbar Rotation Stretch



- A. Lie flat on your back with both legs out straight. Bend one leg with the foot flat on the floor.



- B. Take the knee across the body, trying to get the inner knee to touch the floor on the other side of the body. Keep your lower back on or parallel to the floor. Hold for 30 seconds, then switch to the other side. Repeat twice on each side, holding for 30 seconds.

Variation: the hand can be used to bring the knee closer to the floor to increase the rotation and stretch if necessary.

## Alternating Leg and Arm Raises (Supermans)



- A. Lie on your stomach, arms stretched out past your head with palms and forehead on the floor. Tighten your abs.



- B. Lift one arm (raise your head and shoulders) and the opposite leg at the same time, stretching them away from one another. Hold for 5 seconds and then switch sides. Repeat 3 times on each side (work up to 5-10 times).



Alternative/Advanced: Raise both arms and legs, stretching them away from each other. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times. Work up to 5-10 times.



- A. Position the center of the band underneath your foot. Hold the ends of the band in your hands and start with your arms straight, pointing to your feet. Bend forward slightly at the waist.



- B. Pull upward to chest level, keeping your elbows bent out behind you. Pull up with your back muscles, not your arms, and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Return to starting position and work up to 10-12 reps.



### Variation

- A. Sit on the floor with legs slightly bent in front. Loop the band around the soles of your feet and hold one end in each hand.



- B. Start with your arms out in front of you. Pull back so your elbows bend out behind you and your hands come to chest level. Pull up with your back muscles, not your arms, and squeeze your shoulder blades together.