

Yogic ABC's of Back Care

Most back problems are related to lifestyle and posture - how you stand, sit, lie down, or move. Learn yoga for your back and notice the difference.

Awareness:	90% of the game
Adjustment:	Experiment with micro-movements, explore/honor your edges
Attitude:	Practice patience, curiosity, compassion, and gentleness
Breathe:	Ujjayi breath & Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril)
Core Strength:	Important for a strong back
Consistency of Practice:	Do "something" every day, several times a day

Ayurvedic

Pacify the Vata dosha - add oils to skin and diet, grounding, strengthening, calming, fluid movement (nothing jerky or rough), moisture, increased hydration, sipping hot water all day, consistent routine, daily meditation, ghee, avoid raw, dry foods and cold drinks, stay warm, daily gentle yoga.

Throughout the day:

- Maintain lordosis in lower back – sitting bones down, no rounding ever. Pay close attention to how you sit/stand/drive/sleep/move.
- Use pillow behind sacrum when sitting on chairs, especially seats in planes and most cars.
- Learn to engage the core and elongate the spine, using good body dynamics for standing, walking, and lifting.
- To come up from lying down, always roll to the side and use your arms to push yourself up.
- Try Half-Frog and Sphinx Pose when the back acts up, and use them preventively.
- Learn to release the psoas muscle, balancing abs and psoas.

To heal and avoid worsening existing back injuries:

- Be aware of forward bends and twists. Seated forward-bends are the most risky and a forward bend with a twist is the most risky of all.
- When standing, the sacrum must tilt forward well. People with tight hamstrings or tight hip rotators are more prone to injury. When these are tight they prevent the pelvis from tilting forward enough.
- Loosen hamstrings & hip rotator muscles through yoga. This frees the pelvis to move independently from the legs & therefore reduces risk of injury. Regular yoga

practice will eventually free the pelvis. Practice yoga with great awareness – what stretches the hamstrings is also what can cause the greatest injury if done with poor alignment.

- Supta Padangustasana is an effective way to stretch the hamstrings and hips safely.
- Modify Uttanasana, standing forward fold: always come down with straight spine, keeping lordosis in lower back, elongate spine, do not tilt beyond level of sacrum, use a block to support weight, and always come up with arms out to sides, elongating the spine.
- Focus on hip joints, not lower back. 90 degree rule – no bending forward until pelvis is at 90 degrees to legs. Tight hamstrings prevent this.
- Lengthen the spine to pull vertebrae apart, increasing space for the nerves and helping the disks soak up fluid (e.g. push hands into floor in Dandasana). Elongate with every pose.
- Engage the abdominals to protect the lower back.
- Sit well at all times, maintaining lordosis. Use blankets or props to re-establish curve and release psoas. Take breaks if sitting long (lying down is best). Gentle back-bends are good.
- Prolonged sitting can increase lower back issues (office, plane, meditation cushion). The effect on the disks is cumulative. The pelvis must always tilt forward when sitting or bending.
- Strengthen and stretch erector spinae muscles by standing poses and elongating front of body while coming out of Uttanasana.
- Strengthen abs (knees bent for partial sit ups). Do not do full boat pose (with legs straight). If abs get too tight can cause lumbar compression – therefore always include backbends.
- L5 – S1 and L4 – L5 are most vulnerable to injury because they bear more weight and leverage is greatest here. Forward bends and twists can damage this area if done incorrectly. Listen to your body and honor it - keep it moving preventively in healthy ways.
- Develop a well-balanced daily yoga practice including deep relaxation or yoga nidra to reduce stress.