

Pilates Exercises for Back Pain Relief

No. 1

Client who is avoiding movement because of their back pain

Standing

Head Turns x 5 each way

Standing tall and upright
Turn your head as far as it will comfortably go to the right
Return to the centre
Turn your head as far as it will comfortably go to the left
Return to the centre

Shoulder Shrugs x 10

Breathe in to shrug up
Breathe out to draw down (feel a connection in the armpits)
Can also be done with the arms bent

Shoulder Rolls x 10

Keeping your arms relaxed lift the shoulders and roll them backwards, then down and forwards
Breathe wherever is comfortable

Stretchy Band Breathing

Wrap a broad Stretchy Band around your lower ribs and cross it at the front, holding on to the ends with relaxed arms
Breathe in to the sides of the ribs and feel the resistance of the Stretchy Band
Breathe out and let the stretchy Band compress your lower ribs

Walking through the feet x 4 each side

Standing with your weight on one leg
Roll through the foot from the back to the front with the other foot as if you are walking in slow motion
Start the pressure on the heel, roll out slightly, and then across onto the fore foot and push off with your toe

Towel Grab

Standing tall and upright with your toes at the edge of a towel
Pull the towel in with your toes as far as you can bunch it up
Work the towel away from you with the toes
Repeat with other foot

Toga (Toe Yoga) x 5 breaths each way

Part a.

Standing tall and upright separate your Big Toe for the other toes on the Right Foot and work them into the 'splits' The Big Toe points forwards and the others backwards.

Work the foot into the ground and explore the uncomfortable areas

Repeat of the Left side

Part b.

Standing tall and upright separate your Big Toe for the other toes on the Right Foot and work them into the 'splits' the other way - The Big Toe points backwards and the others forwards.

Work the foot into the ground and explore the uncomfortable areas

Repeat of the Left side

Cossack Twist x 5 each way

Stand with your feet parallel, and your arms folded like a Cossack in line with your shoulders

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to twist from the waist to one side as far as you can go without moving your hips.

Breathe in to return to the centre

Breathe out to repeat other side

Roll Downs against the Wall x 5

Starting position. With your feet parallel, away from the wall, legs bent, and the spine neutral

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to tuck the chin and peel the spine from the wall, one vertebra at a time, until you are fully rolled down.

Breathe in to the sides of your ribs to hold

Breathe out to restack the spine, replacing one piece of the spine to the wall at a time

Hip Hitch x 10 each side

Standing in an upright posture with your feet hip distance apart and facing forwards

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to zip and hollow as you drift onto the left foot, floating the right knee up in line with your hip

Hitch your left hip upwards without moving your shoulders

Breathe in to bring it down below the other hip line

Ballet Squats (Plies)

Standing Tall and upright evenly on both feet
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to squat straight down, keeping the knees parallel
Breathe in to come back up
Don't stick your bum out behind you

Corkscrew Arms x 10

Standing tall and upright
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to Zip and hollow to float both arms up sideways, slightly in front of you and leading with the thumbs, bringing the hands up above your head and interlacing all the fingers behind the head
Breathe in to shrug your shoulders up
Breathe out to draw the shoulders down and open the elbows backwards
Breathe in to leave the shoulders connected to the body and release the hands floating the arms up
Breathe out to drift the arms out and back down to your sides

Semi-supine Position

Semi-Supine Position

Lying on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Legs and feet are hip distance apart. Your arms are down by your sides and gently reaching towards the toes, with the gaze straight upwards. Breathe in sideways into the ribs and zip and hollow as you breathe out

Getting up from the Semi-Supine Position

Always roll fully onto your side and then use your arms to push you up into a seated position. Slowly stand up from there

Lower Back Legs Parallel

Lie in the relaxation position with your arms out at a 45° angle
Keeping your feet on the ground, allow the knees and hips to roll to the left, turning your head to the right
Take a few breaths at the bottom
Breathe out to zip and hollow, using the abdominal muscles to bring back the ribs, waist, hips, knees and head
Repeat on other side
The knees slide past each other and the feet stay on the ground

Chin Tucks x 5

Start Looking straight in front
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to press the back of the head back and up, giving yourself a double chin
Breathe in to release

Shoulder Drops x 10

Start with the hands above the shoulders
Breathe in to reach one arm up
Breathe out to slot the shoulder blade back into place

Protractions and Retractions x 7

Start with the hands above the shoulders
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to reach both arms up towards the ceiling
Breathe in to return the shoulder blades back into place

Elevations and depressions x 7

Start with the hands over head towards the floor
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to reach both arms up and back towards the wall behind you
Breathe in to return the shoulder blades back into place

Arm Float Raises, (Rib Cage Closure) x 5

Breathe in to float both arms up and overhead
(without moving spine)
Breathe out to float the arms back down to your waist

Arm Float Opposite Ways x 5

Start with the hands above the shoulders
Breathe in to float one arm overhead towards the floor and the other down towards your side (without moving spine)
Breathe out to float the arms back down up to the start
Repeat other side

Pelvic Compass x 3 in each direction

There is a compass lying on your pelvis
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the nose (North)
Breathe in to return to the neutral position
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the left (East)
Breathe in to return to the neutral position
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the toes (South)
Breathe in to return to the neutral position
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the right (West)
Breathe in to return to the neutral position
Keep your pelvis in contact with the floor the whole time, and allow the knees to move slightly as they follow the pelvis

Cushion Squeeze

Start with a cushion between your knees
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to squeeze the cushion with both knees
(the pelvis stays still on the mat)

Hip Roll Preparation

Lying in the relaxation position with your arms out at a 45° angle
Keeping your knees together and pivoting on the outside of the left foot, allow the knees and hips to roll to the left, turning your head to the right
Take a breath at the bottom
Breathe out to zip and hollow, using the abdominal muscles to bring back the ribs, waist, hips, knees and head
Repeat on other side
The outside foot lifts off the ground and the knees stay together

Pelvic Tilts x 3

Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the nose (the lower back flattens into the mat)
Breathe in to return to the neutral

Spine Curl Articulations x 5

Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the nose
Once at full tilt start to peel the spine off the mat, one piece at a time
Breathe in to hold at the top
Breathe out to return the spine and pelvis onto the mat in reverse order
Squeeze with the buttocks!

Breathe in to return to the neutral

Lying On your front

Cobra Prep x 5

Start with your hands in the 'How' position with your thumbs in line with your nose. Your legs are shoulder width apart and turned out.

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to zip and hollow, float your head up and forward as if you are pushing away a marble with your nose. Continue this arc with the upper spine and start arching up like a cobra

Breathe in at the top to hold

Breathe out to lay the spine back down again

Work progressively higher every time

If you get to the point where you want to lift your arms off, keep the shoulders away from the ears and float the elbows off last

The elbows go back down first on the roll back down

Big Squeeze x 10

Start with your hands one on top of the other and your forehead on your hands. Your toes are together and the heels are rolled out

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to squeeze the buttock, inside thighs, knees, and heels together, zipping and hollowing at the same time

Breathe in to return to the floor and let go

Diamond Press x 10

Start with the hands in a diamond shape. Forget about the legs

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to float the back of the head towards the ceiling

Breathe in to return to the floor and let go

Prone Leg Lighten x 5 each leg

Start with your hands one on top of the other and your forehead on your hands. Your legs are shoulder width apart and turned out

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to squeeze the buttock and make one leg lighter, reaching the toes away from you

Breathe in to release the leg back down

Keep your hips still

Prone Leg Lifts x 5 each leg

Start with your hands one on top of the other and your forehead on your hands. Your legs are shoulder width apart and turned out

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to squeeze the buttock and float one leg up behind you

Breathe in to bring it down

Keep your hips still

Rest Position

Kneel back over your ankles, letting your arms reach out in front of you and your forehead towards the mat.
Breathe into the sides of your lungs and release the whole body with every out breath
The aim of this position is to stretch the lower back and even under the armpits.
It should be comfortable and relaxed

Stretch Position

Kneel back and up with your backside over your ankles, letting your arms reach out in front of you and your chest towards the mat.
Breathe into the sides of your lungs and release the whole body with every out breath
The aim of this position is to stretch the lower back in the opposite way to the Rest Position and even under the armpits.
It should be comfortable and relaxed

2 Point Kneeling

Kneel Backs x 5

Starting upright on your knees with your arms crossed in front of you
Push your hips forwards as you lean back from the knees
Keep a tall upright posture and look diagonally upwards
Only go as far as you comfortably can
Expect a stretch and a muscular engagement in the thigh

4 Point Kneeling

Four Point Kneeling Hingeback x 5

Start in 4 Point Kneeling
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to hinge the whole body back as far as you can go without losing the neutral spine and neck
Breathe in to come back

Cat Stretch x 5

Start with the shoulders away from the ears, and chest pushed toward the ceiling
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to tilt the pelvis, tucking your tail between your legs, curling the whole spine upwards into an 'angry cat' arch
Breathe in to the side of the lungs to hold
Breathe out to un-tilt the pelvis, sticking your tail out and unrolling the whole spine to the neutral

Tail Swish Stretch x 4 each way

Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to stick your backside out to the right
Breathe in to return to the centre
Repeat to the left
Keep your spine neutral the whole time

Fish Stretch x 4 each way

Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to Look over your right shoulder towards your tail at the same time as you stick your backside out to the right
Breathe in to return to the centre
Repeat to the left
Keep your spine neutral the whole time

Side Lying

The Clam x 5

Lying on your side with your bottom arm stretched away, and a pillow between your head and shoulder. Your legs are bent and you are lying against an imaginary wall with your head, shoulders, hips and heels touching the wall.
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to zip and hollow, floating the top knee away as far as you can without leaning backwards
Breathe in to return the knee to the start position

Bent Leg Lifts x 5

Lying on your side with your bottom arm stretched away, and a pillow between your head and shoulder. Your legs are bent as if you are sitting in a chair, with a 90° angle at the knee and hip.
Breathe in to prepare. Breathe out to lift your top, bent leg up in line with your body and horizontal.
Breathe in to return the leg to start position

Outside Thigh Series x 10

1. Lift and Lower

Lying on your side with your bottom arm stretched away, and a pillow between your head and shoulder. Your legs are bent as if you are sitting in a chair, with a 90° angle at the knee and hip. Send your top leg away in line with your body and horizontal.
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to zip and hollow, floating the top leg away as high as you can without shifting the pelvis
Breathe in to return the leg to the horizontal

2. Horizontal

Breathe in to bring the leg as far forward as you can without tucking the pelvis under
Breathe out to bring the leg as far back as you can without arching the back

3. Circles x 5 each way Breathing naturally, draw circles on the opposite wall with your top leg

4. Leg Rotations x 4 each way

Breathing naturally, Rotate the leg in the hip joint, pointing the knee up and down, while keeping the leg at the horizontal

Chalk Circles x 5 each way

Lying on your side with a pillow under your head and neck, both your arms are stretched away in front of you
Both legs are bent with a 90° angle at hips and knees as if you were sitting in a chair

Breathe in to take the top hand along the floor overhead as if you were drawing a large circle around your head with a piece of chalk

Continue to make the circle by leaning back with the body and the hand drifts past you hip and back to the start

Follow the hand with your gaze

Position of Ease

Start in the Outside Thigh Position, take the top leg up and over the bottom leg and allow it to relax down on to the floor, lean backwards with the top shoulder to create a pleasant twisting position of ease through the outside thigh into the torso.

Relax for three breaths

Picnic Shoulder x 10

Lying on your side on your forearm with your legs bent and your elbow directly below the shoulder.

Slouch into the shoulder, breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to press the elbow into the mat sending the shoulder away from the ear

Breathe in to slouch into the shoulder

Seated on a chair

Spine Twist

Sit upright with your legs straight out in front of you and the backs of the knees against the front of the chair. Arms horizontal in your peripheral vision

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to rotate the trunk and arms to one side looking at your back hand as you go (the pelvis and legs stay still)

Breathe in to return to the centre

Seated on a Chair Pelvic Tilts x 3

Sit upright with your legs straight out in front of you and the backs of the knees against the front of the chair. Arms are relaxed down by your sides
Breathe in to prepare
Breathe out to tilt the pubic bone toward the nose (the lower back flattens into the mat)
Breathe in to return to the neutral

Shake Hands with your Feet

Sitting comfortably, bend one leg and place the foot over the other knee for support
Take hold of the foot with the other hand and start threading the fingers in between the toes. Try to get all fingers all the way between the toes to the knuckle
Work the internal bones, muscles and arches of the foot with the hand for at least one minute.
Repeat other side

Stretches

Kneeling Hip Flexor Stretch

Kneel with one foot flat on the floor out in front of you. The back foot is either up on your toes or flat and relaxed
Keeping a neutral spine move the whole torso forwards, bending the front leg without changing the shape of the spine
Feel a stretch in the front of the upper thigh of the downward leg.
Hold for 1 minute, then change to the other leg
To increase the stretch, bring your hands up in line with your shoulders and twist the torso towards the upper leg

Seated Gluteal Stretch

Hold for 45 seconds in total
Sitting on the front edge of a chair, bend your left leg and put the ankle over the knee over the right leg which is straight, foot on the floor
Sit up tall and from here, lean the whole neutral spine forwards, feeling the stretch in the outside thigh of the left leg
Repeat other side