

## Pilates Exercises for Back Pain Relief

## No. 2

**Client who is generally well, but has some back pain**

### Standing

#### **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

#### **Cossack Twist**

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

### 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

### **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

### **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

### **Curl Up x 7**

Interlock the Hands behind the head  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to tuck the chin and curl up toward the knees  
(the pelvis stays still on the mat)  
Breathe in to return to the neutral

### **Oblique Curl Up x 5 each Side**

Interlock the Hands behind the head  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to tuck the chin and curl up, taking one shoulder  
towards the opposite knee (the pelvis stays still on the mat)  
Breathe in to return to the neutral  
Repeat on other side

### **Single Knee Fold x 5 each Side**

Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to float one leg up to a 90° angle at knee and hip  
(the pelvis stays still on the mat)  
Breathe in to return to the floor  
Repeat on other side

## **Double Knee Fold**

Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to float one leg up to a 90° angle at knee and hip  
Breathe in to hold  
Breathe out to float the other leg up to as well  
(the pelvis stays still on the mat)  
Breathe in to hold  
Breathe out to float the 1<sup>st</sup> down to the start position  
Breathe in to hold  
Breathe out to float the other leg down as well

## **Curl Up in a Double Knee Fold (Table top) Position x 7**

## **Oblique Curl Up in a Double Knee Fold (Table top) Position x 5 each Side**

## **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

### **Head Press x 5**

Start with one hand on top of the other and your forehead on your hands

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

Keep your shoulders away from your ears!

### **Starfish x 5 each side**

Start with your arms out in front of you along the floor, shoulder width apart. Your legs are shoulder width apart and turned out.

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to zip and hollow, and float one arm off the floor at the same time as the opposite leg.

Breathe in to come down

Breathe out to repeat other side

## **Dart x 10**

Start with the arms along your side and the palms facing up  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to do a Big Squeeze, float the back of the head towards the ceiling and float the arms to the horizontal, turning the palms in the way  
Breathe in to return to the floor and relax

Remember to pull the belly button off the floor!

## **2 Point Kneeling**

### **Thigh Stretch x 8**

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**

### **Cat Stretch**

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

### **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

### **Four Point Kneeling Sitback**

Start in 4 Point Kneeling  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to lift the knees off the mat by 1 inch  
Breathe in to hold  
Breathe out to drift the whole body back as far as you can go without lifting or lowering the knees  
Breathe in to come back

## **Opposite Arm and Leg Slide combo**

### **2. Opposites**

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out to zip and hollow whilst floating one arm out in front at the same time as the opposite leg floats behind

Breathe in to return

Breathe out to zip and hollow whilst floating the other pair forwards and back

Breathe in to return

Ensure that the hips and shoulders stay square!

## **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

### **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

### **Hip Lighten x 10**

Lying on your side on your forearm with your legs bent and your elbow directly below the shoulder. Press yourself away under the armpit as at the top of the Picnic Shoulder  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to press the forearm and knees into the mat lightening the hips but staying on the floor  
Breathe in to return to the mat  
Use the top hand to help press into the floor if necessary

### **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

### **Hip Lift x 10**

Lying on your side on your forearm with your legs bent and your elbow directly below the shoulder. Press yourself away under the armpit as at the top of the Picnic Shoulder  
Breathe in to prepare  
Breathe out to press the forearm and knees into the mat sending the hips off the floor straight up  
Breathe in to return to the mat  
Use the top hand to help press into the floor if necessary

### **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

## Seated on a chair

### **Arm Reaches with Spine Flexion x 3**

Sitting tall, arms relaxed by sides.  
Breathe in to prepare, place hands on shoulders.  
Breathe out to reach straight arms up to ceiling, palms facing together,  
look towards fingertips, alternately reaching each arm further towards ceiling x 4  
Breathe in, breathe out to flex forward towards mat, breathe in to hold.  
Breathe out to restack body. Repeat x 3

### **Rotation x 3**

Sitting tall, arms relaxed by your side, palms on knee. Breathe in to prepare, breathe out to rotate, taking your gaze behind you, following with your head, neck & shoulders. Place one hand on the opposite knee, other hand behind you. Gaze over back shoulder, hold, breathe in & breathe out to deepen twist. Breathe in to return to starting position. Repeat on the other side.  
*(use your arms to pull you around)*

### **Lateral Flexion x 3**

Sit upright with your knees in line with your hips.  
Breathe in to prepare,  
Breathe out to lift and reach your right arm up and over as you bend sideways to the left whilst placing the left hand on the mat,  
Breathe in to pause  
Breathe out to return to the starting position.  
Repeat other side.  
*Reach through to the fingertips and take the hand in as large an arc as you can*

### **Extension x 3**

Sitting tall, legs hip distance apart, arms resting on thighs.  
Breathe in to sweep your arms behind you placing them on the back of the chair, lift your sternum towards the ceiling, stretching your back. Breathe out to return to starting position

### **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