

# Dr. Colin Gage

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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Exercise for back pain

Nearly every day one of my patients asks me if it is ok to exercise when their low back hurts. The answer I give may vary depending on the severity of their low back injury. However, nine times out of ten I will tell them to keep the injured area moving by exercising lightly.

Once the low back is injured, mild forms of exercise (done in a controlled, gradual, and progressive manner) are typically necessary to rehabilitate the joints of the spine, remove unwanted inflammation, and help alleviate muscle spasm.

Exercising the low back is a natural stimulus for it to heal itself. Movement distributes nutrients into the disc space and soft tissues in the spine to keep the discs, muscles, ligaments and joints healthy. And the converse is true too—lack of exercise can worsen back pain by leading to stiffness, weakness, and de-conditioning. Therefore, if someone tells you to go home and just rest your sore back, you may want to get a second opinion. There is no shortage of research showing that immobilizing an injured joint for too long actually prolongs and even inhibits proper healing.

Generally, a patient's back pain exercise program should encompass a combination of stretching exercises (such as hamstring and erector spinae muscle stretching), strengthening exercises, and low impact aerobic exercise (such as walking, bicycling, water therapy or swimming). Depending the patient's specific diagnosis and level of pain, the back exercises should potentially be very different. Therefore, it is important for patients to see a spine specialist, such as a chiropractor, who is trained to develop an individualized exercise that uses the correct form and technique.

Even more importantly, a regular back exercise routine provides patients with the means to help avoid recurrences of low back pain, and helps reduce severity and duration of potential future episodes of low back pain. Combine this with regular preventative chiropractic treatment and your chance of experiencing an acute bout of low back pain lessens even further. For example, a growing proportion of my patients are now "wellness" patients. This means that I examine and treat their low back perhaps once a month, in conjunction with them doing exercise and stretching on their own, to address any small problems long before they become painful big problems. Therefore, they are

not coming to my office because they *have pain*, they are coming because they *do not want the pain in the first place*. Being proactive is much more cost effective than being reactive.