

# TOP 10 WAYS TO SAVE YOURSELF FROM BACK PAIN

Oh no! Not again! You moved the wrong way, that didn't feel right, and sure enough the next day your back is killing you! Now what? There are several things you can do to get yourself some relief!

**1. For starters.....take a break from the culprit.** Were you running when it happened? Take a break from running. Were you lifting? Stop lifting for awhile. Were you garden- ing? Yoga? Moving boxes? Give it a rest. I can not tell you how many patients continue to do the activity that caused the injury despite being in pain. No, it does not mean that you will never run or lift or do yoga again. It means that activity caused an injury and you need to let it heal. It is your body telling you to change activities while it heals. Often times the culprit is the activity that you do the most. It causes overuse injuries. Perhaps consider varying your routine for a long-term solution.



**2. Get moving.** "What? You just said to rest." No, I said to rest from the culprit. When you are in pain, you may want to lounge in your favorite chair that encourages bad posture or worse.....stay in bed! Walking in good shoes (not flip flops!) is ideal. It does not have to be a fast pace. Inter- mittent slow walks of 10-20 minutes help to loosen tight muscles and shift any pressure on your low back nerves.



**3. Lift properly.** Many, many back injuries occur from poor body mechanics when lifting. Over 90% of disc injuries reveal themselves while bending forward, slightly rotated, lifting something. When a person is in pain, he/ she is acutely aware of how they are lifting, mostly because it hurts. But then it starts to feel better, maybe the pain goes away, and 5 or 6 months down the road.....BOOM! It happens again! "I only bent down to pick up a pencil and my back went out again!" No, you have been using poor body mechanics for 20 years. The pencil was just the straw that broke your back! Always, always bend at the knees when lifting, keep your knees above your ankles, your back straight. Pull the object close to your body and then lift straight up. This must become a way of life, a reflex, if you are going to save yourself from back pain.



**4. Stretch your hamstrings.** The hamstrings are a large muscle group in the back of your thigh that cross over the hip joint. When they are very tight, they certainly contribute to low back pain. When you are injured, all stretches are done to your tolerance. It should feel like a stretch, not sharp shooting pain. Don't forget to breathe. Everyone wants to hold their breath when stretching. Inhale and exhale while you hold the stretch, ideally for 30 to 60 seconds.

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**5. Stretch your piriformis.** “Piri-WHAT?” Piriformis is a muscle that runs diagonally through your buttocks. It turns your leg outwards (toe out). It crosses over the sciatic nerve. When piriformis is tight, it creates pain down your leg, also known as sciatica. Remember to breathe when stretching. Don’t hold your breath!



**6. Stretch Psoas,** also known as your hip flexors. With the increasing popularity of computers, gaming and technology, the number of hours that the average individual sits at a desk or TV has also increased dramatically over the last 30 years. Some patients sit for 8-12 hours a day at work! Add in air travel, road trips to the kid’s soccer tournament, and any activity that involves sitting like cycling and horse-back riding!! Since sitting is the number one enemy of the hip flexors, we have a PSOAS crisis on our hands! Tight hip flexors will cause low back pain!



**7. Change your workstation and daily routine at work.** If you sit all day, it will be very hard to relax the hip flexors. There are workstations that allow you to change position throughout the day, so you can alternate sitting and standing in intervals. Take the stairs when possible. Walk to the water cooler. If you have been sitting for more than an hour or two, get up and stretch.



**8. Strengthen the low back.** Historically we neglect the muscles in our low back. Everyone wants a flat tummy. Most think “the core muscles” are only the abdominal muscles. In doing so, we create muscle imbalances between the abs and the low back. Muscle imbalance will cause low back pain. Start with simple exercise and graduate to more difficult exercises. Muscle balance is the goal.



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**9.** Learn to use a foam roller correctly. Foam rollers are a great in home investment. They can be used to work out all of the muscles we have mentioned: the hamstrings, piri-formis, and psoas.



**10.** Hop in a pool. “But I don’t have a pool.” Many local gyms or YMCA’s have day rates of \$10-\$15. There is a reason why so many people with arthritis participate in water activities. The buoyancy of the water allows decompression of the joints and permits movement that weight bearing activities do not allow. Just walking back in forth in waist deep water is a fabulous activity for arthritic pain. If you are feeling more ambitious, try an aqua class.

## **BONUS:**

### **When to seek professional help...**

So you have tried these things. There’s no change, it is getting worse, or it continues to occur. It’s time for a professional evaluation. At Johns Chiropractic and Rehabilitation, we will find the root cause of the problem through a detailed physical examination. We will write a script for x-rays or an MRI if it is warranted. We will put together the best plan of action to get you back to wellness so you can enjoy the highest quality of life. Then we will teach you how to take care of your spine.

If it’s time for a professional opinion, call **Johns Chiropractic & Rehabilitation** today at **610.265.0220.**