

# Low Back Pain Solutions



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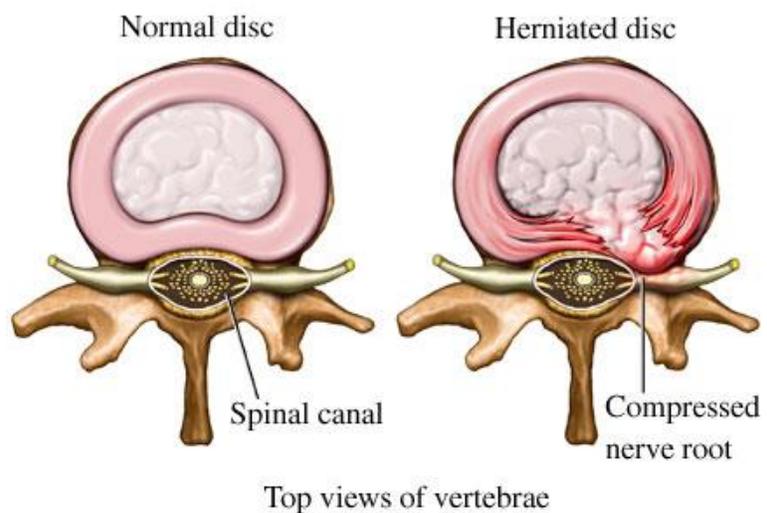


There are many different causes of lower back pain and understanding the source of your pain is the first step to solving the problem. If you have chronic lower back pain that alters your movement or limits you in your chosen activity, you should get it checked by a professional. A good orthopedic doctor, chiropractor or physical therapist is a good place to start to get checked up. Once you have a better idea of where your low back pain is coming from, it is easier to make a plan for addressing it.

**Some possible causes of lower back pain include:**

1. Strains and sprains
2. Degenerative disk disease
3. Ruptured disks
4. Spinal fractures
5. Sciatica

This list may seem scary, but the good news is that in many cases we can address these issues through exercise (instead of surgery!). For example if you have a posteriorly herniated disc, **(pictured right)**



then strengthening your abs with spinal flexion movements such as sit-ups would be a poor choice. This is because this exercise would make your problem worse by pushing the nucleus (gel inside) out of the disk through the torn annulus (outside ring). This will push further into your

spinal canal where it can pinch the spinal nerves even more. So one solution does not fit everyone's problem, again, we need to know why your back is hurting in the first place.

### **Moving poorly keeps us in a state of pain**

If you have some type of herniation, degenerative disk disease, fused disc or irritated spinal nerves then a good course of action is to work on movement quality and stability. By movement quality I mean finding better ways to do the activities you need to do in your daily life so that don't cause yourself pain. *You have pain triggers that set off your lower back pain or make it worse*, you might even know exactly what these are. Part of getting rid of your pain is learning these triggers and avoiding them.

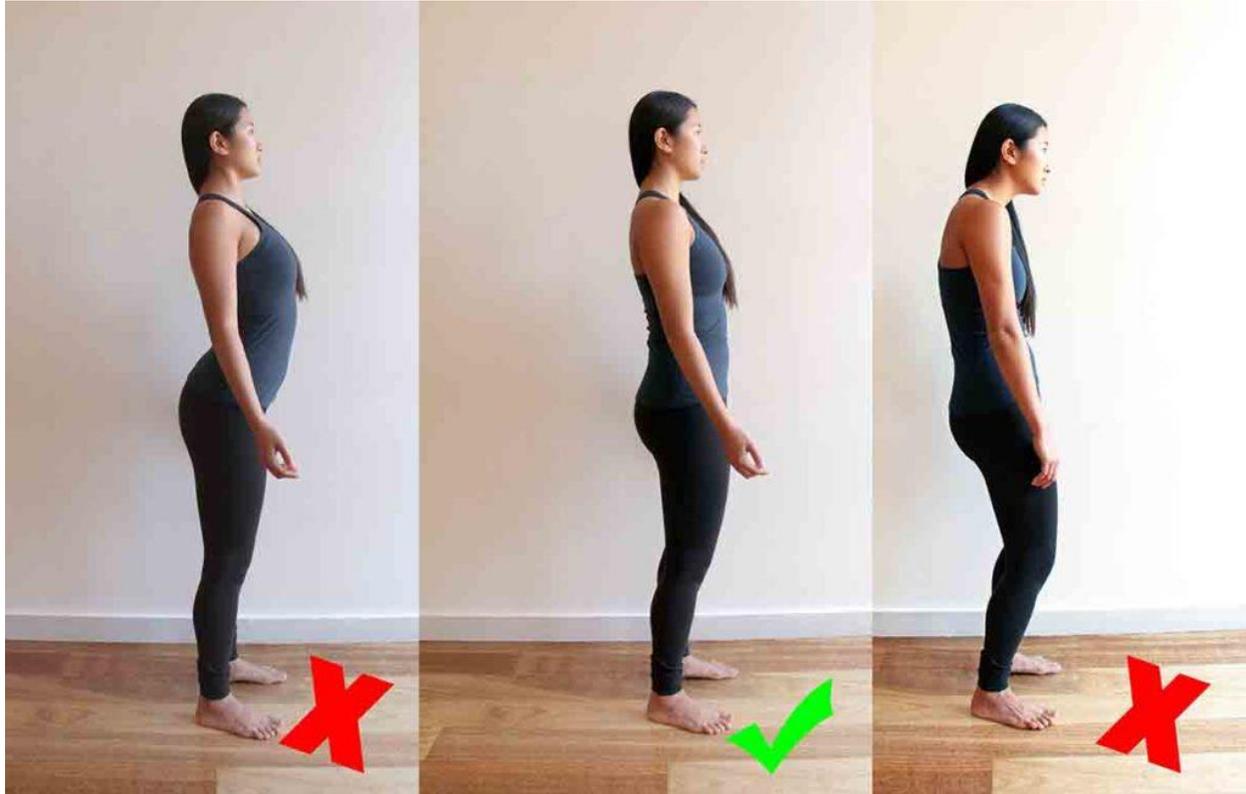
It may seem really simple, but when we are in pain we should be looking for positions and ways of moving that keep us pain-free. In this way we allow the pain signals in our brain and spinal cord to turn down their intensity and eventually we will get out of pain.

This is also called “spinal hygiene” when we focus on moving in spine friendly ways. As an example, keeping your spine straight when you bend down to grab something by using your legs and hips, is something everyone can benefit from. Avoiding rotating and over reaching especially

while holding onto heavy objects is another important consideration.



## Strengthen your neutral position



Another part of this process is strengthening our spine in a neutral position (**the middle picture**). We don't want to irritate the spine with a lot of bending and twisting. For most people with lower back pain, these actions will exacerbate the issue. Instead we want to strengthen the muscles around the spine but by doing things isometrically and help the spine to hold a neutral orientation. Examples of this include the variations of plank exercises where no movement occurs in the spine but the muscles are loaded and strengthened.

A basic routine that will address all aspects of the core musculature to stabilize the spine needs to include the following; Anti-extension exercises, anti-lateral flexion exercises, anti-rotation exercises, and anti-flexion exercises. I will give examples for each of these and a simple routine to follow.

## The back strengthening routine

**Front Planks:** 3 sets of 20 seconds to start, work your way up to 1 set of 2 minutes.



**Side Planks:** 3 sets of 20 seconds on both sides to start, work your way up to 1 set of 2 minutes.



### **Paloff Press:**

Start with 3 sets of 10 repetitions on both sides and build up your repetitions to 20. At that point you can increase the resistance.



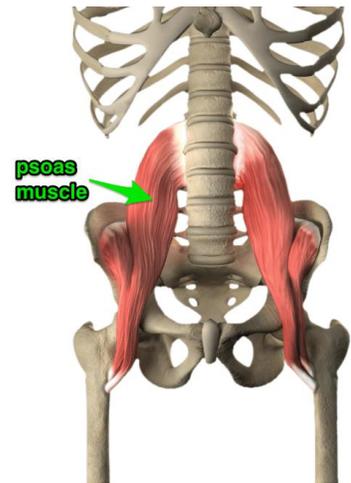
### **Bird Dog:**

Start with 3 sets of 10 repetitions on both sides and build up your repetitions to 20. Then you can try more demanding variations.



## Stretch your tight muscles

This may come as a surprise but lower back pain often comes from tightness in your hips. Especially in the hip flexor muscles called the psoas. These muscles attach directly to the front of the lower spine and pull it forward. When these muscles are tight and the other muscles of the spine are not doing their job, pain is often the result.



There are many muscles that should be stretched in order to improve lower back function but this is the most crucial stretch for the psoas.

### **The Kneeling Lunge**

Get into a kneeling position (use a thick mat if this bothers your knees) and make sure your front foot is flat on the floor. Without arching your back, push your hips forward until you feel a stretch on the front of your hip. You should feel this on the leg that you have your knee on the floor.



To make this stretch more directly target the psoas, take your kneeling leg and turn your lower leg out to the side. Imagine rotating your knee into the ground as your foot goes to the outside. This will cause the psoas to lengthen even more. Lastly, raise your arm overhead (same side as kneeling leg) and bend sideways from the waist, away from the kneeling legs side. Hold for 30 seconds, repeat 3 times on both sides.

For more information on lower back pain, or to setup a free fitness assessment, email [jared@giammalva.com](mailto:jared@giammalva.com)

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