



THE EXERCISE ROUTINE THAT FITS INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

For the 80 percent of us who will suffer back pain at some point in our lives, it may come as a surprise to learn that the old remedy – a prolonged period of bed rest – may do more harm than good.

Modern experts are instead prescribing an active lifestyle as the best answer to backache in all but the most severe cases, as keeping the back moving is the surest way to help manage the pain.

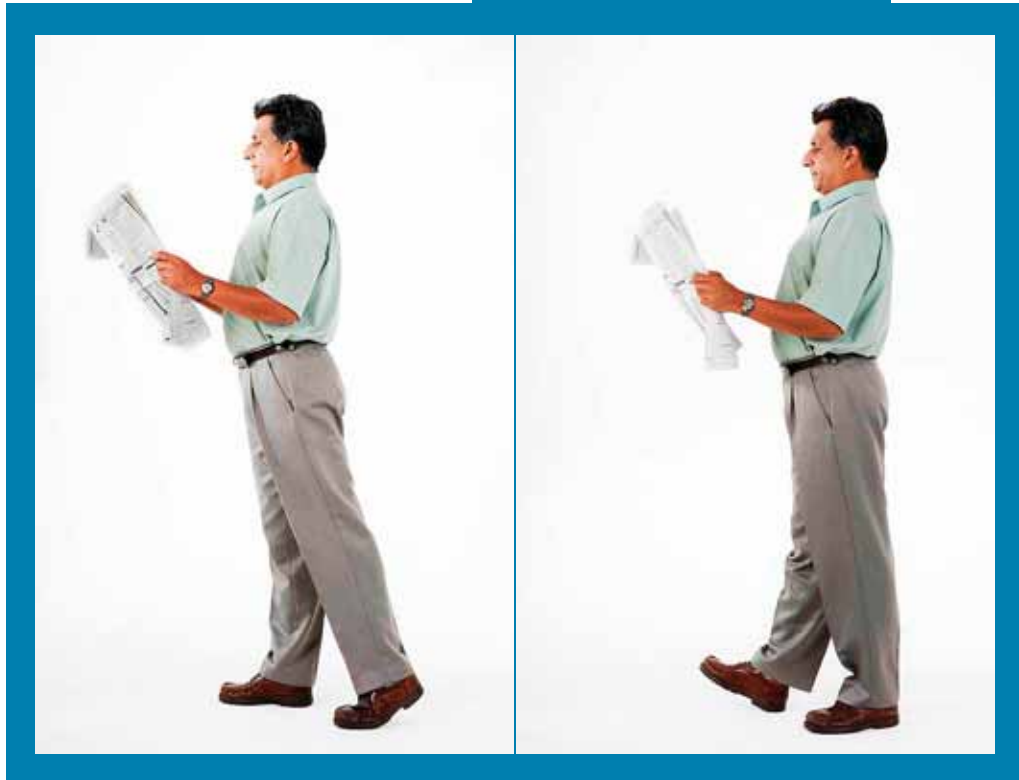
This is the message behind the Health and Safety Executive's Better Backs campaign. It has teamed up with the charity BackCare to highlight how easy it can be for anyone to keep their back healthy through normal, everyday activity.

A special exercise routine has been devised by back health expert Liz Prosser of BackCare to turn everyday actions, from travelling between home and work, to doing the supermarket shopping, into back-friendly exercises.

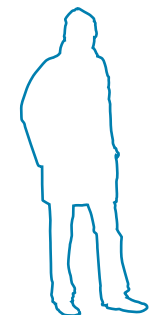
The Better Backs routine can be completed every day, without access to specialist equipment or a personal trainer. The following instructions accompany a set of simple images demonstrating the different activities. All the exercises are best repeated.



STANDING TALL



This simple exercise can be done any time you are on your feet – making tea in the morning, or reading a magazine at the train station. Stand tall with one foot forward as if you are walking. Start with weight on your back foot, tighten your stomach and slowly rock forward onto your front foot. Hold this position for 10 seconds then let go.



TUMMY STRENGTHENING AT THE BUS STOP!



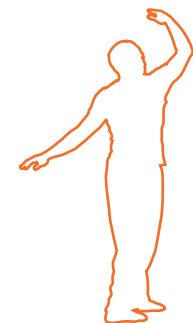
This stretch can be done whenever you stand still, whether it is waiting at the bus stop on the way to work, or at the photocopier – and no-one will even know! Stand up tall, drawing your navel in towards your spine. Make sure that your back is not moving and don't forget to keep breathing. Hold for 10 seconds and slowly let go.



AT THE SHOPS



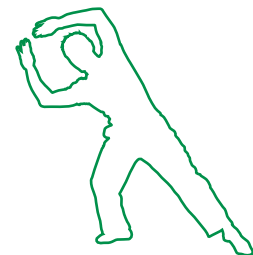
Finally, proof that shopping is good for your health! When you are reaching to pick up a can of soup – or this season's latest fashion accessory – from a shelf, stand with feet hip width apart, draw in your lower abdominal muscles and lift up on to toes. Reach up to the shelf and hold your balance a few seconds longer than usual. Take hold of the item and lower yourself slowly, retaining control and posture, breathe out and relax. If unsteady, use a support until you are more confident.



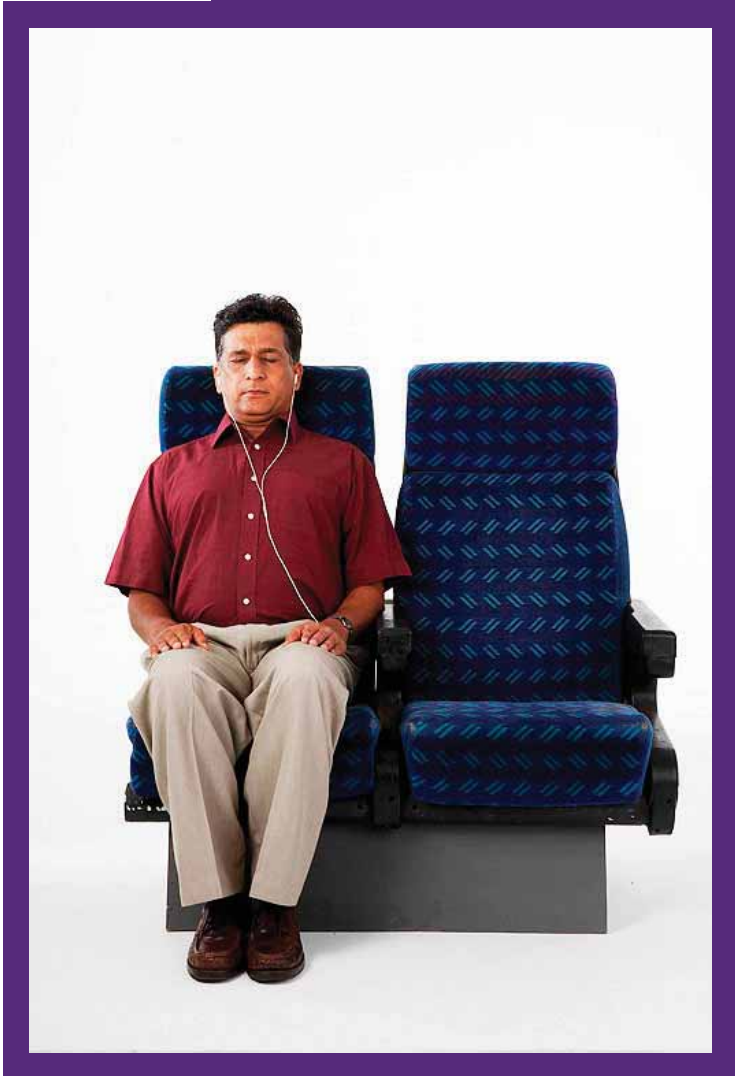
THE SHOPPING TROLLEY LIFT



This method of reaching down to pick something up can help you protect your back in many different scenarios – golfers use it all the time to pick up their ball from the hole. Hold the trolley with your right hand, tighten your stomach muscles, stand on the right leg, bend at the hips and gently lift a straight left leg behind you as you lift your shopping from the trolley. If one side of your back is weak, lift and straighten the leg of your weak side which will keep your spine neutral and stable.



SHOULDER RELAXATION



You can try this action when you are sitting down, maybe on the bus or train to work. Sit with your hands in your lap and pull your shoulders down as if they have a heavy weight on them. Slowly pull your shoulder blades slightly back as if you were going to touch them together. Keep pulling your shoulders down while doing this. Keep pulling your shoulders down while doing this. Hold for 10 seconds then slowly let go.



SHOULDER/NECK RELAXATION



An old favourite – while sitting at home or at your desk, gently roll your shoulders forward and then back. That's it.



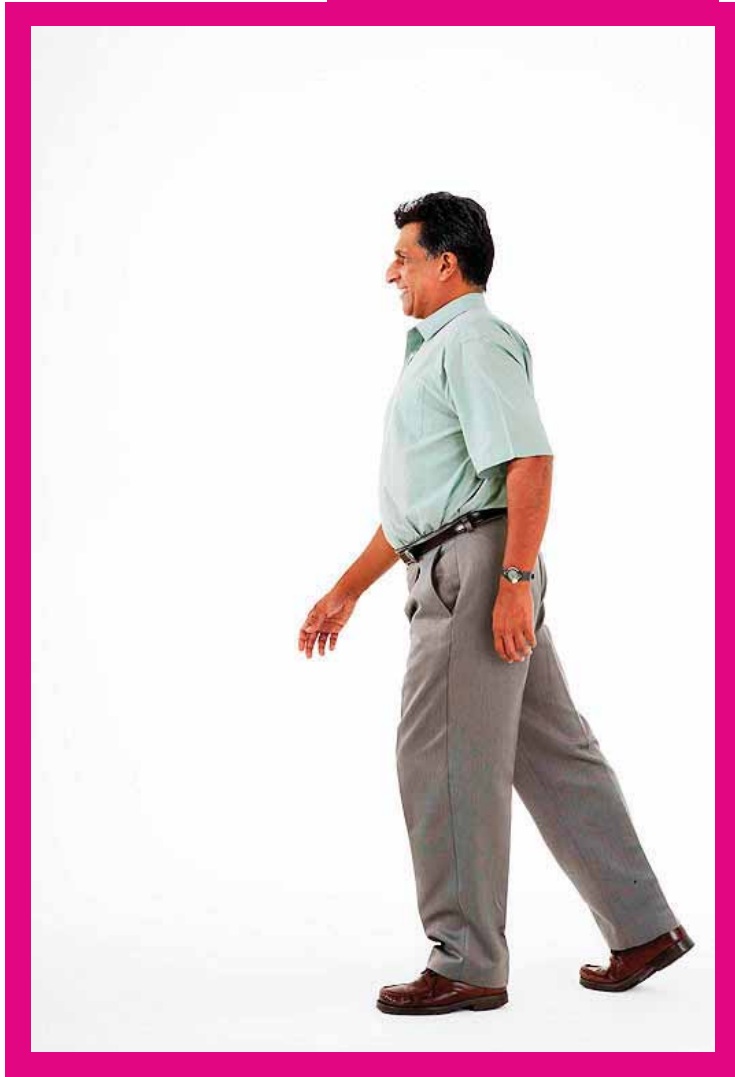
LEANING AGAINST A WALL



This is really one that you might feel more comfortable doing at home, but can be done any time you have a moment, and a wall near you! Stand with your back touching the wall, bend your knees slightly and lean back until your shoulder blades and base of your spine are against the wall. Drop your shoulders and breathe out and hold it for as long as is comfortable.



WALKING



Walking is usually one of the best forms of exercise. Wear comfortable shoes with cushioned soles and low heels. If you have been struggling to walk distances, you could try to get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way home.

