

5 Steps Away From Lower Back Pain



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Hi, my name is Teira Jansen

Every day, my team and I help people suffering from lower back pain to get on the road to recovery and start to live the active life they want to live, without being controlled by their back pain.

We have a very systematic approach to treating back pain, which ensures our patients know what is going on in their lower back, what they themselves can do to improve their pain and what the best management approach is so they can once again have confidence in their back. This brief guide will explain why our approach is the best approach as well as give you some great tips.

Teira Jansen



If you want to be free of Lower Back Pain, you need our 5 Steps away from Lower Back Pain Guide to get you started

Did you know that up to 80% of Australians will experience back pain in their lives? Studies show that an active approach including hands on treatment and exercise will not only decrease the amount of time you suffer from back pain, but ALSO decrease the likelihood of it returning. So, if you are suffering with back pain, you aren't alone!

But, if you aren't doing anything about it, either because you think that back pain is just part of life, you are putting it down to old age or you are hoping it will improve spontaneously, then you are setting yourself up for more back pain that might start to affect other parts of the body and actually stop you from doing what you love.

The issue with back pain is that once you experience it, the good, core muscles that stabilize your back become much weaker and often just turn off, leaving you to rely on your bigger, global muscles to stabilise your back – a job that they do badly. This often results in more pain, more stiffness and more impact on your life.

Our 5 steps away from Lower Back Pain Plan is a great start managing your back pain. It will give

you some very useful exercises to try at home. It will also give you the tools to decide whether you need to see us for our Better Backs Rehabilitation Program.

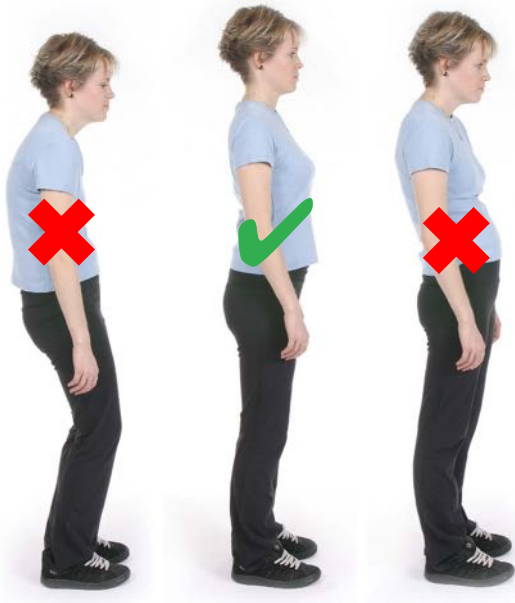
Our Better Backs Rehabilitation Program includes:

- Assessment and diagnosis of the cause of your lower back pain
- Development of an individualised 6-12 week rehabilitation plan including:
 - a. Hands on treatment to re-establish normal back movement and reduce pain
 - b. Real time ultrasound to ensure you are activating correct core muscles
 - c. Exercise based therapy to improve core strength and improved your confidence in your back
 - d. Education surrounding the best treatment for your back pain.
- Follow up testing and program modification to ensure you are reaching your goals.

We hope the following steps are helpful. Please contact us if you need further help.

5 Steps away from Lower Back Pain

Step 1 – Good Posture: Standing correctly



Do you every catch a reflection of yourself in a shop window and wonder when you started to stand like that??

There are so many tips for good posture that it can really be quite overwhelming – we are always told to stand up straight but this doesn't always equal good posture. Often when I ask people to stand in what they think is good posture, they stand in such a rigid and uncomfortable position that there is no way that it can be comfortable or good for them!!

Also, when your back is sore, you often try to stand in a way that alleviates the pain, but this often puts strain on other structures and can lead to more problems:

But, good posture is REALLY important when you have back pain so here are some easy to use tips (with instructions too, don't worry!!).....

- Stand with your weight evenly distributed between both feet
- Align your rib cage over your hips
- Lengthen through the back of your head

Exercise to try at home:

Lets start with the feet:

1. Feel your weight evenly between both feet, left and right.
2. Stand with soft knees (very slightly bent).

3. Take your weight gently forward to your toes and then back to your heels.
4. Now, take your weight to halfway between these two points – this is where your weight should be when you stand.

Next, rib cage over hips.....

1. Stand side on to a mirror
2. Put one hand on your sternum and one on your pubic bone
3. Bring your sternum hand in line with your pubic bone hand so that your rib cage sits comfortably over you hips.

Finally, lengthen through the back of your head:

1. Imagine you have a ponytail with a helium balloon attached to it
2. Allow the balloon to gently lift your head from the pony tail to lengthen the back of your neck

This is a great standing posture for your back (and knees, hips and neck) and should feel comfortable and painfree.

Practice getting into this position 3-5x/ day and hold for a count of 30 seconds. It should become much easier to get into position and become almost natural over the next few weeks.





The last thing you tend to feel like when your back hurts is going for a walk or doing some exercise. Usually what you feel like is curling up on the couch with a heat pack and some pain medication BUT.....

Research shows that the best thing for most back pain is to get moving. When you have back pain, a lot of muscles (usually global muscles) go into spasm, causing excessive compression, stiffness and pain in your back.

Gentle activity can help effectively relieve this spasm. Obviously you need to be sensible about this, choose your activity wisely and listen to your body – if you experience a significant increase in pain during or following the activity, you should seek advice from a Physiotherapist. Remember this isn't the time to start Marathon training or attack the overgrown jungle in your back yard!!

Step 2 – Keep moving (or get moving!!)

These are our top suggestions for activities that help Low Back Pain:

- **Walking** – start with multiple 5-10 minute walks per day on a flat surface to help loosen your muscles up. As you become more comfortable, slowly build up how long you walk for, introduce hills and pick up the pace a little.
- **Swimming** – this is a great exercise for backs as it reduces the effect of gravity and can give a gentle traction in the lower back. Whether you are most comfortable with Freestyle, Backstroke, Breaststroke or a combination. You can also try introducing a kickboard, pool buoy or flippers to mix it up a bit!
- **Hydrotherapy** – back in the pool! A great exercise option when it is too uncomfortable to exercise on land. We have Physiotherapist run hydrotherapy classes that make backs feel great.
- **Pilates** – our advice is go with Physiotherapy run classes to ensure you are doing the exercises correctly and under Professional guidance. Great for strengthening that core (more about this later)



Step 3 – Modify Your Activity – Mix It Up A Little

What can you do to help your back today?

Think about your day.....

Do you find yourself either sitting or standing for prolonged periods of time? Or do you do the same repetitive lifting or twisting movement throughout your day?

If so, its great to break up these tasks with quick little exercises to offset the effect of sustained or repetitive movements.

When sitting or standing for prolonged periods, try and take a 2 minute stretch break every 30 mins. This can be as simple as walking around the office or going to the bathroom.

If your jobs requires your to do repetitive movements, like repeatedly twisting to the left, add some twisting to the right to even it out.

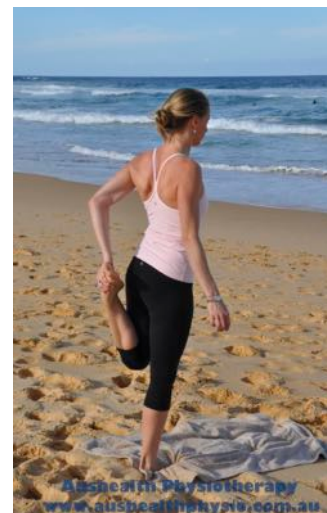
Here are a few of our favourite quick exercises to integrate into your day and leave you feeling great. Always remember though that these should not be painful to do or make you feel more pain following. If they do, don't continue them.

Exercises to try:

- **Marching on the spot** – stand up and literally march on the spot, lifting your knees to hip height. Repeat 20 times on each leg.
- **Childs pose** – (see above). Start in 4 point kneeling and sit back on your heels whilst reaching your hands out in front of you. Hold this position for 30 seconds whilst taking nice deep breaths down into the bottom of your rib cage. If you find this too much of a stretch to start, try placing a pillow under your feet or under your bottom.



- **Touching your toes** – stand up tall and then roll down, chin to chest, chest to belly button, all the way down till you get a comfortable stretch through your legs and lower back. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds and slowly roll back up.
- **Quads/hip flexor stretches** – (see left). This is a great stretch for anyone who has to sit all day. If you can't grab your foot, you can just put it on a chair behind you. The most important part is to open up the front of your hip. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat twice each side.



Try adding these stretches into your day and maybe even a quick walk at lunch time and see how much better you feel.

Remember stretches should be comfortable and you should be able to maintain normal breathing whilst doing them.



Step 4 – Use your core the right way!

People are always told to strengthen their core but what does that actually mean.....?



I can't begin to tell you how many patients I have seen that have been doing Pilates classes at their gym for the last 4 years but still have no idea how to activate their core correctly. You can get very in depth and technical about this but to be perfectly honest, that can just get confusing. So, here is a quick anatomy lesson, why core is important and a few tips on what it should feel like when you "turn on your core". Oh, and something to try at home!

Anatomy lesson:

Imagine a can of beans.....

- The top of the can is your diaphragm (the part that helps you breathe)
- The sides of the can are your Transversus Abdominus (TA) and Multifidus
- The bottom of the can is your Pelvic Floor

Why is your core important?

These muscles work together to stabilize all of the little joints in your back. They are known as control or stability muscles. When your core is not working correctly, the global muscles take over. The normal role of the global muscles is to move your body. They don't do a great job of stabilizing your back, instead causing a lot of compression in the spine – leading to pain and dysfunction. So, let's agree that its worth getting those core muscles to work because they are important!!

What should it feel like to turn on your core?

The biggest mistake I see when people activate their core incorrectly is that they actually bear down (push down like when straining to void), instead of drawing up. This is effectively turning all those great core muscles off!!

When you activate your core correctly, you should feel a gentle lifting sensation through your Pelvic Floor, TA and Multifidus (bottom and sides of the can). You should also be able to continue to breathe normally using your diaphragm (top of can) whilst maintaining this contraction. This can be a little tricky and may take a bit of practice.

An exercise to try at home:

This can be done in sitting, standing or lying on your back with your knees bent up. If you have difficulty "getting the feeling" in one position, try a different one.

1. Relax by taking a few gentle breaths.
2. Breathe in, and then out and as you breathe out, gently draw up (contract) your pelvic floor. You should feel the lower part of your abdomen lift and become slightly firmer and you might see you belly button drawer in slightly.
3. Hold this contraction for 3 breaths and then relax completely.
4. Repeat until you find it difficult to feel the muscles activating any more. (Remember these are just like any muscles, if they are weak, they will fatigue quickly so you need to build them up slowly.)
5. Repeat the exercise a 2-3 times per day until it becomes easier and more natural.
6. Progress to holding for longer periods of time in different postures.
7. Get Professional Advice – if you aren't sure if you are doing it correctly – don't waste your time. Get assessed by a Physiotherapist who can guide you through it. Our clinicians use Real Time Ultrasound to get an actual picture of what your muscles are doing to give you the best feedback.



Step 5 – Know when you need to get help – use the checklist.

So, what can be done?

In short, there is a lot that can be done.

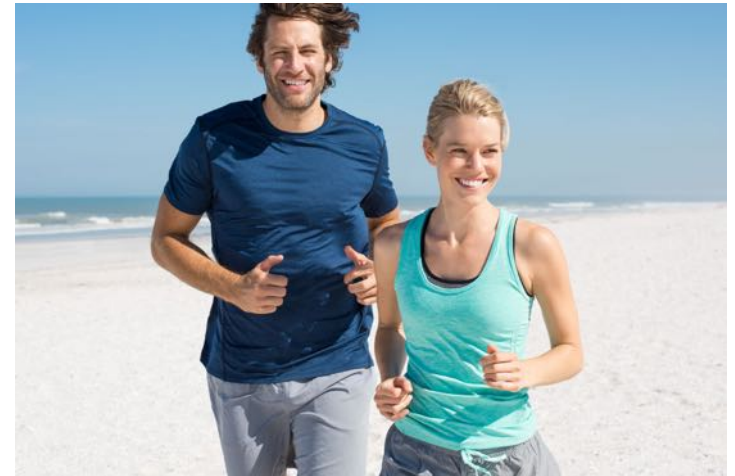
Often we see people who are a long way down the path of back pain. Some have seen GP's or Specialists who have given them medication or sent them for scans and injections. But they are still in pain. If that's you, use it as an opportunity to take an active approach to your back pain.

As I mentioned initially, this 5 Step Guide is just a part of our Complete Better Backs Rehabilitation Program, an holistic program focused on taking control of your pain and regaining confidence in your back with every step.

Do I need to see a Physio?

Here is a simple checklist to guide you. If you tick any of the following, we recommend you see a Physio trained in treating lower back pain:

- I have pain radiating into one or both of my buttocks/legs.
- I get pins and needles, numbness or changes in sensation in one or both of my legs
- Gentle exercise makes my back sorer.
- I have difficulty sitting or standing for long periods due to my back pain
- I have started strengthening my core and my pain has improved slightly but I don't know what to do next to progress.
- I have had back pain for over 1 month or I have had recurrent episodes of low back pain.
- I felt pain in my back when I lifted something and it isn't going away.
- I avoid certain activities because I am worried that they will hurt my back.
- I have difficulty getting a good night sleep because of discomfort or pain in my back.



I ticked a box and I want to get back to doing what I love – what do I do next?

Take control of your back pain before it starts to control you and keep you from doing the things you enjoy.

To let us help you, simply call us on 9905 0048 and we can organize an appointment for you or go to www.aushealthphysio.com.au to make an online booking.

We have 2 convenient locations in Brookvale

- o Level 2, Brookvale House, 1a Cross St
- o 9B Cross St, Brookvale





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