

# Muscle matters: Build a back-friendly daily routine

**You feel a burning pain or numbness in the small of your back. Your muscles tighten after you've been sitting or standing for a long time. Pain radiates into your hips and pelvis, making every step difficult.**

These symptoms indicate that you're suffering from low back pain. While some causes are beyond your control, you can take simple steps to build a back-friendly routine.

## Exercise your way to better back health

Good back health begins with proper exercise. Devote at least 30 minutes most days to both aerobic activity and strength training. Don't save all your exercise for the weekend; that can lead to injury.<sup>47</sup>



### Aerobic activity<sup>48,49,50</sup>

Aerobic exercise increases blood circulation, sending more nutrients to your spine. It has also been shown to reduce the need for pain medication and physical therapy among back pain sufferers. The key is to select low-impact activities like power walking, swimming, cycling or using an elliptical trainer, step machine or rowing machine.

Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. (At a moderate rate you can talk but not sing; at a vigorous rate you can say only a few words at a time.)



### Strength training<sup>51,52,53</sup>

When you strengthen your abs, obliques and the other muscles in your core, you improve your posture and balance and reduce the likelihood of injury. Strength training has also been shown to reduce pain and improve quality of life among back pain sufferers.

You can do strength training at the gym with free weights or weight machines, but you can also work out at home using resistance tubes or your own body weight. Visit <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/fit-for-duty-corporate-wellness/strengthen-your-back-12-easy-exercises-for-lower-back-pain.html> for 12 easy back-friendly exercises.

Aim for 12 to 15 repetitions of each exercise you do. Do strength training at least twice a week, taking a day off between sessions to let your muscles recover. (Rest periods are when muscles actually grow.)

Note: Consult a doctor before starting an exercise program if you have a serious health condition.

47 <https://www.bones.nih.gov/health-info/bone/bone-health/exercise/exercise-your-bone-health>

48 <https://www.spine-health.com/wellness/exercise/low-impact-aerobic-exercise>

49 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14588388/>

50 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise-intensity/art-20046887>

51 <https://bmjopensem.bmj.com/content/1/1/e000050>

52 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046670>

53 <https://www.healthline.com/health/exercise-fitness/rest-day#doing-rest-right>

54 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806175/>

## Be back healthy at work<sup>55,56,57,58,59</sup>

Office workers spend long hours sitting at computers. Factory workers, farmers and other labourers spend long hours standing, stooping or handling heavy weights. All these actions can harm the back.

### Here are some steps to take:

- Be sure the spaces where you work—including your home office—are ergonomically designed.
- Maintain good posture.
- Take frequent breaks to stand or walk around, ideally for five minutes every hour.
- Avoid standing for long periods, and wear comfortable shoes if your job requires you to stand.
- Learn to lift properly, and get help handling heavy objects.
- Minimise twisting and bending motions and actions that cause whole-body vibration.
- Don't try to work through pain. Instead, seek prompt medical help.

## Be back healthy at play<sup>60</sup>

People are often far more active at the weekend than during the workweek. While sport, gardening and other leisure activities are beneficial to both your physical and mental health, it's important to protect your back when enjoying these activities.

### Here are ways to protect your back:

- Strive to be physically active throughout the week, not just at the weekend.
- Start slow and get warmed up before doing any strenuous activity.
- Gradually work up to longer periods of activity.
- Remember that actions that cause pain when you're working, like twisting and lifting, can also cause pain when you're playing.
- Work with a coach to learn proper technique for your favourite sport.

You don't have to be a bodybuilder for your muscles to matter. Healthy muscles help prevent or minimise a wide range of physical and mental health conditions. At our [Musculoskeletal health resources hub](#), you can find the flyers and articles offering easy-to-action lifestyle changes to help you build muscle strength and prevent and manage musculoskeletal problems, including low back pain.

Also, Aetna International members can access the Health Hub—register if you haven't already—to quickly find

self-help tools, professional services, member offers, and to submit and track claims and more. Within the Health Hub, you can learn more about the Kaia app, which provides curated, customised guidance from pain-treatment experts, and ClassPass, which offers virtual fitness classes.

For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

## Straighten up. Stretch out. Stay strong.

### Musculoskeletal support resources:

<https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/musculoskeletal-health-support-resource.html>

**Health Hub:** <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

55 <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/sitting-disease-how-a-sedentary-lifestyle-affects-heart-health>

56 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/back-pain/art-20044526>

57 <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2019/01/04/how-to-sneak-in-healthy-physical-activity-during-a-sedentary-work-day>

58 <https://www.backline.com/blogs/articles/industrial-workers-and-back-pain-everything-you-need-to-know>

59 <https://www.hsj.gr/medicine/effect-of-physical-and-psychosocial-factors-on-occupational-low-back-pain.php?aid=3156>

60 <https://www.spine-health.com/conditions/sports-and-spine-injuries/sport-injuries-back-injuries-and-back-pain>