

Say Goodbye to Low Back Pain

In Hong Kong, most office workers are no strangers to low back pain, as it is even more common than cold or flu! However, why do we have low back pain, and how can it be cured? The good news is that in most cases, patients do not require complicated treatment. Simply through correcting misconceptions, taking the right actions, engaging in an appropriate amount of physical activity, and developing a habit of exercising regularly, it is believed that low back pain can be alleviated!

Causes

The following are the causes of frequent muscle tension and spasms in most patients, which would eventually result in low back pain:

- Maintaining an incorrect sitting or standing posture for an extended period of time
- Maintaining the same posture (prolonged sitting, staring at the monitor) for an extended period of time
- Having insufficient strength in the core and back muscles (a lack of exercise)
- Repeatedly bending over and lifting heavy objects using an incorrect posture for an extended period of time
- Being overweight (excess abdominal weight increases the burden on the back muscles and the spine)
- Getting injured in a previous accident

How to treat/improve

Most cases of low back pain show significantly improvement and may even prevent recurrence after proper management. The key lies in correcting three misconceptions:

1. Avoid "lying flat completely/maintaining a sitting position for an extended period of time" → Engaging in an appropriate amount of physical activity actually aids recovery
2. Do not rely solely on painkillers or pain relief patches → They only treat the symptoms, not the root cause
3. Treat "exercise" as a long-term habit, not just an emergency measure

We should start with prevention, including correcting poor posture and performing back stretches to enhance our mobility, thereby avoiding imposing excessive pressure on the lumbar spine and the surrounding areas, and preventing injuries to soft tissues such as muscles, ligaments and tendons. Below are some stretches that can help prevent low back pain:

1. Lateral stretch

- Stand with your legs apart, with your left hand on your hip. Lift your right arm straight up.
- Push your pelvis to the right at the same time until you feel the muscles on the right are stretched. Hold this position for about 10 to 30 seconds.
- Relax and return to the starting position, then switch to the other side and repeat the above steps.



2. Seated toe touch



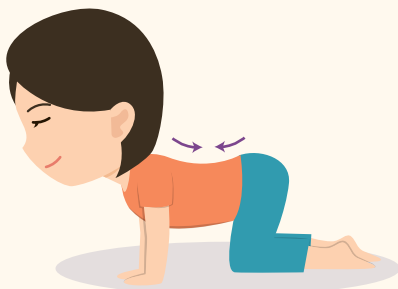
- Sit on the ground with your legs extended and your hands resting on your thighs.
- Flex your toes upwards and lean your body forward. Try to reach the tips of your toes with your fingers until you feel the muscles on the back of your thighs and lower back are stretched. Hold this position for about 10 to 30 seconds.

3. Supine single knee-to-chest stretch

- Lie flat on the ground with your head and right heel firmly touching the ground.
- Wrap your hands around the area below your right knee, and pull the knee towards your chest until you feel the muscles in your lower back are stretched. Hold this position for about 10 to 30 seconds.
- Relax and return to the starting position, then switch to the other side and repeat the above steps.



4. Cat-cow stretch (back muscle stretch)



- Place both of your hands and knees on the ground. Bend your back and abdomen downwards, and hold this position for a few seconds.
- Gradually arch your back upwards, and hold this position for a few seconds until you feel the muscles in your lower back are stretched, then repeat the above steps 4 to 5 times.

5. Cobra stretch (prone position with hands on the ground)

- lowly lift your upper body while keeping your pelvis on the ground.
- Hold this position for 5 to 10 seconds, then relax. Repeat the above steps 10 times.



* Notes

1. All movements may be repeated 2 to 3 times and performed occasionally in the morning and evening.
2. The range of stretch should be limited to avoid pain. Remember to perform all movements slowly while maintaining smooth breathing.
3. If low back pain persists, stop at once and consult a healthcare professional.

In addition to stretches, the following small habits may also help prevent low back pain:

- Get up and move for 2 to 3 minutes every 30 to 45 minutes of work, while adjusting your sitting posture and the height of the monitor
- Adopt a “stand-sit alternating” work mode: Stand for 20 to 40 minutes/sit for 40 to 60 minutes
- Engage in low-impact aerobic exercises: e.g. brisk walking, swimming and cycling; do it 3 to 5 times weekly and for 20 to 40 minutes each time

Low back pain is a warning signal that reminds us to pay attention to our bodies and habits, and understand the causes behind. Do not overlook the problem, or the situation will only get worse. As long as patients establish the right mindset, engage in an appropriate amount of physical activity, and cultivating the habit of exercising regularly, most of them can effectively alleviate or even get rid of low back pain, reclaiming a relaxed and comfortable life!

