

The *Ultimate Guide* to
Reducing Your Back Pain

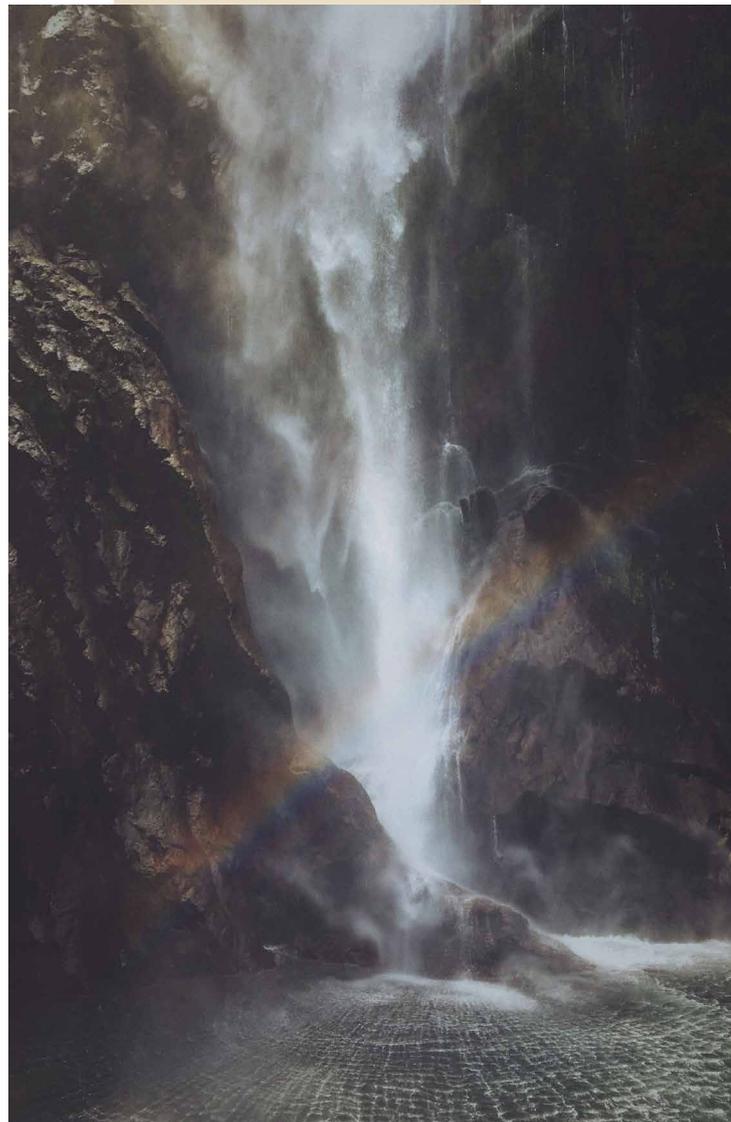
The *Ultimate Guide* to Reducing Your Back Pain

Have you experienced back or neck pain? If you have, you probably aren't using the most powerful tool you have to reduce it—your awareness of your body. You can reduce or eliminate your pain by learning to become aware of your body and focusing on improving your posture. This guide to reducing your back pain will consist of five practices that help you develop control over your posture right now and maintain it over the long haul.

Sounds too easy? Achieving proper posture is easy; remembering to maintain it often is the most challenging part for most people. At first, you have to be aware of your posture all the time until proper posture becomes your default position. Just about everyone has poor posture from today's lifestyle. The many hours we spend sitting, texting, driving, reading or writing cause real problems for our posture that greatly affect health. Whatever the activity, we get lost in it and stop paying attention to where our bodies are. Then the aches, stiffness, and sometimes serious pain start.

You can change this pattern, starting today. With conscious effort, you can lessen those negative impacts, reduce pain, improve your mood and reduce stress. To do this properly you have to consciously change your habits and consciously avoid the old ones. You're going to start to feel the difference today, and soon you'll feel uncomfortable if you slip into the old ways.

Now that you are ready to take charge, you need some guidance in how to get started.



Five tips

Like routinely brushing your teeth, maintaining good posture is one of the most effective and cheapest ways you can avoid pain and promote overall health. That's a big payoff for a routine chore that takes so little time and effort.



This booklet describes five really easy and quick ways to meditate and stretch that will immediately improve your posture, breathing, and state of mind. But they also can have long-lasting benefits to your well-being if you commit to incorporating them into your daily routine and continue your regular visits to your chiropractic and acupuncture practitioner. Taken together, the five practices are aimed at training your mind and body to be mindful of where you are in space. Start with mindset.



1. Be a *gentle* teacher.

The main point with this first tip is to focus on your progress, not your lapses. At first, you'll continually forget about your posture and tend to blame yourself for tuning out. Begin by thinking of yourself as a consciously alert, deeply present teacher who is patiently helping you to find your best path. Be compassionate and gentle toward yourself and your efforts; mistakes and reverting to bad habits will happen. That's okay! You will learn from them. Your teacher wouldn't dismiss you for a mistake. Just as a gentle teacher would instruct you and try to show you a better way, you have to govern yourself and remind yourself of the benefits of sticking to the plan.



Work on recognizing when you start to slouch, or lean, or twist or fail to move from your core. You will intuitively know when you do something that's not proper with your biomechanics, especially when you do it all day at work. In the same way a teacher would be there to guide you, you have to be alert to how you move, how you stand, and how you sit for hours at a time and correct yourself--gently. As you start to be more conscious and aware, your posture will get stronger, your ability to recognize when you're not standing correctly will start to improve.

2. Be a *big* breather.

The best and fastest way to correct your posture is to be conscious of your breath. Breathing is one of the most fundamental things we do as humans, but we rarely pay attention to it. Even though you can never forget to breathe (because your brain won't let you), how often do you really slowly and consciously take a deep breath? Posture and breathing are directly connected and you can't change one without affecting the other. So to begin to change your posture is to breathe in a slow and calm way.



For example, think of how you inhale deeply before a yawn. You probably just yawned, because the word, “yawn” is nearly irresistible. The way you breathe in, just before the yawn, is how you want to breathe in all the time. Breathe calmly and slowly, with the breath starting from the bottom of your belly, never from the top of your lungs. If you can do this - - breathe from your diaphragm, just as an opera singer or a newborn baby does - - you'll begin to relax and your posture auto-

matically fixes itself! At the same time, you will be tapping into how breath changes your mood and actually can calm you. If you think about it, why else is one of the most painful human experiences (childbirth) navigated by mentally focused and forceful breathing (the Lamaze method)? The connection between conscious breathing and pain is hard to ignore because mindful breathing can simultaneously open your lungs, reduce your pain and calm your brain.

3. Be a *mini* meditator.

Eastern teachings and Western science agree that the breath has a direct and powerful connection to your mind. One form of meditation asks us to softly watch our breath, being present to how the air flows freely into our nose and down to our lungs. Watching our breathing is one of the most direct ways we can connect to the present moment. It's one of the strongest ways we can take a moment, be fully present and connect to the here and now. Try it right now. See how it focuses your mind on the present moment and it's the only thing you can do at that time.

Meditation is said to be one- pointed concentration. If you focus on just one thing, like your breath and stay focused only on your breath - - then technically you're meditating! Here's a little trick: try breathing in through your nostrils for a count of 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds and then breathe out for 8 seconds. Try now and give it a go! Breathe in 1...2...3...4. Hold your breath 1...2...3...4...5...6...7. Breathe out for 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8. Look at you, you're a mini meditator!



You should do this as often as you can, wherever you may be, as it will eventually help to strengthen your body's awareness. Over time it will help you calm down, reduce your poor posture and begin to cognitively recognize the way stress affects your frame. The next time you get cut off in traffic, the doctor is late again or the kids make a mess in the clean house try to use your breath in real time. You can use that reaction as an opportunity to come back to the mini meditation, come back to your breath, and watch how your stress can melt away with each exhalation. Breathing is not going to resolve the external problem, but it will help your body to relax and tamp down your emotional reaction. Afterward, once you've relaxed and your posture and breathing have come back to normal, you're probably going to be better equipped to take on the issues in your day!

4. Be a *focused* yogi.

Now that you know how to meditate, you are ready to learn a quick stretch that feels like another mini meditation while it adjusts your posture during extended periods of limited motion, like sitting or driving. Once you get the hang of it, this stretch induces proper breathing and moves oxygen and blood, which together will help you to stay focused and feel better, both physically and mentally.

To do this stretch (called Bruegger's relief position), start by looking at the illustration and then follow these few steps:



1. Sit on the edge of your chair with both feet flat on the ground; keep your elbows straight and your arms relaxed at your sides. Be sure you're sitting straight, but not rigid or leaning in any direction.

2. Now, gently rotate both of your hands so that your thumbs turn away from you and your pinky fingers turn toward your thigh.

3. Relax your jaw, and press your chin back gently almost like you're giving yourself a double chin.

4. Bring your shoulders back and down. Think about your head being slightly pulled up by a string from the ceiling. You'll feel the muscles in your back between your shoulder blades, the rhomboids, engage and you'll feel the muscles on either side of your neck, the trapeziuses, relax and get mushy. That's what you want at all times when you stand, sit or walk. You don't want to feel dramatically forced with the contraction; you want to feel slightly engaged in the mid-back muscles, the rhomboids, as the motion brings your chest high.



Hold this position in a relaxed way for at least 30 seconds or up to 2 minutes every hour.



You can do this stretch when you begin to notice that your back is achy from inactivity. Come back to this place when you feel yourself slipping with your posture. Use it as a home base that you can always rely on to relax and engage the proper muscles. Repeating this stretch will build your gentle knowledge of your body in space, what scientists call, “proprioception.” It will also help strengthen the key muscles you need for proper posture (the rhomboids) and relax the muscles you need to

relax (the traps). Over time, the traps become fatigued from holding your heads up when you sit with poor posture. Many of us have been holding our heads up improperly this way for a long time. Undoing this takes time; remember to be patient, but be confident that you can ultimately do it. Engaging your middle back muscles like this over time eventually increases your body awareness, keeps your neck relaxed, your breath deeper, and your back pain at bay.

5. Be an *empowered* patient.

You can do a lot to help your posture, but sometimes these daily self-checks listed above aren't enough. Acupuncture and chiropractic support proper musculoskeletal function, reduce pain, reduce stress and also greatly help your posture and breathing. Instead of visiting your practitioner to get treated only when you have pain, start coming in to avoid those episodes of pain. Keep your posture in line by getting regular chiropractic adjustments and wellness acupuncture treatments. If you come in only when you are in pain, treatment will take more time and be more difficult for you. . .

Most people get great benefit from being treated at least once every month or two, especially if they sometimes neglect their posture. Using the ancient wisdom from the Eastern world and the newer scientific tools of the Western world, these powerful forms of healing will make you confident that you are

doing all you can to ensure that your posture and body stay strong. You will ultimately benefit from more oxygen, a calmer mind, a relaxed body, and a reduction of overall pain. Along with your own efforts, this regular maintenance will improve your quality of life and make it more enjoyable.

5 ways to fix your posture

Be a gentle teacher. Always keep your body in check.

Be a big breather. Always breathe deeply.

Be a mini meditator. Always be mindful of your breathing.

Be a focused yogi. Always come back to your center and move from your center.

Be an empowered patient. Always make health a priority.