



Dealing with Back Pain

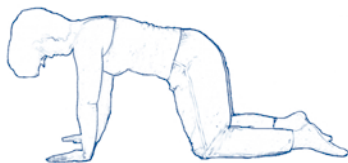
The following information is taken from *The Multifidus Back Pain Solution*, by Jim Johnson, P.T., New Harbinger Publications, Inc., CA, 2002. If you are dealing with back pain, I highly recommend reading the book. Jim Johnson is a Physical Therapist specializing in back pain, and has scoured the scientific literature on back pain research in writing the book. What he has found is that the multifidus muscle seems to play a major role in having a healthy spine or having back pain. The multifidii are a small, deep set of muscles that go from the transverse (side) process of one vertebrae to the spinous (center) process of the vertebrae immediately above it. They are responsible for about 2/3 of the total stiffness that all the back muscles collectively give to the spine.

When comparing people who have back pain and those who don't, few people without back pain have an abnormal multifidus muscle, while many to most people with back pain (acute, sub-acute, and chronic) have an abnormal multifidus muscle on the same side and at the same level as the pain. In contrast, 64%+ of people without back pain show structural abnormalities such as a herniated disc, a degenerative joint, a compressed nerve, etc.

With this in mind, the following set of exercises are given as a way to strengthen the multifidus muscles. Start with Exercise #1, and do it two to three days per week, with a day of reset in between (three days of exercise is optimal). Once you are able to do twenty reps, change to doing Exercise #2. Exercise #3 is for people that are not able to comfortably be on their hands and knees. Once you are able to do twenty reps of either Exercise #2 or #3, you can add ankle weights and again work up to being able to do twenty repetitions. The amount of weight each person can add will vary, but you should still be able to do at least ten repetitions with the weights on. Once you have strengthened the multifidus adequately, you can reduce the frequency to once a week to maintain the strength you have built up.

Starting Position for Exercises #1 & #2

Start on all fours with your back in a neutral, comfortable position.



Exercise #1

Slowly raise one leg until it is close to horizontal, hold for one second, then return to all fours. Repeat with the opposite leg. This is one repetition.



Exercise #2

Slowly raise the right leg and left arm until they are close to horizontal, hold for one second, then return to all fours. Repeat with the opposite leg. This is one repetition.



Exercise #3

Start on your stomach, with or without a pillow under your belly, whichever is more comfortable.



Slowly raise one leg until the foot is about 6 inches off the ground, hold for one second, then lower the leg. Repeat with the opposite leg. Do not arch your back. This is one repetition.



Exercise #4

If you are unable to do the first three sets of exercises for any reasons, you can try this isometric exercise. Stand (preferable) or sit and place one hand on the lower abdomen and one on your lower spine. Tense your stomach muscles by pulling the belly button up and in. Keep the rest of your body still. Your hands should feel the ab and back muscles tighten. Hold this position for 3-5 seconds and relax. This is one repetition. Repeat, eventually working up to twenty reps.

Refer to your doctor or physical therapist with any questions you may have about starting an exercise protocol.