

Exercising with Back Pain

By Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, of *Spine & Scoliosis Specialistss*



Should I just lie in bed and avoid exercise if I am having back pain? Your physical therapist may suggest short periods of rest followed by brief exercises to reduce your pain. Prolonged bed rest is not healthy and can cause your muscles to weaken and your joints to get stiff. Any exercises you do should be done only under the direction of your Spine Specialist. Extra pain after these or other exercises usually indicates that you are overdoing it. Talk to your Spine Specialist if you are having extra pain after exercising.

What exercises should I do to keep my low back toned and healthy?

Common factors in chronic back pain include weak abdominal and trunk muscles, unhealthy posture, and overall deconditioning due to lack of exercise. Exercises should be chosen to offset each of the problem areas that contribute to back pain.

Lumbar and abdominal stabilization: Studies show that exercise training for the abdominal and low-back muscles can improve back stability, reduce pain, and make it easier to do activities of daily living.

Postural exercises: Putting safe posture in action is important to protect your back from injuries that add up when the spine is strained in stationary postures.

Aerobic conditioning: A well-rounded program for maintaining a healthy spine should include some form of aerobic exercises. Examples may include walking or swimming. It is important that you choose an aerobic activity you enjoy. Remember to check with your Spine Specialist before beginning an exercise program.

Are abdominal ‘crunch’ exercises the best way to avoid low back pain?

Not necessarily. Abdominal crunches do help strengthen the upper abdominal muscles. But many people with chronic back pain already have fairly strong upper abdominals. Chronic back pain has been

linked to a loss of muscle quality and nerve function in the lower abdominals. These problems mean that other muscles, including the upper abdominals, must take over and do more of the lower abdominals’ job. Strengthening the upper abdominals with exercises like crunches may help low back pain feel a little better. But strengthening the lower abdominals is more important in preventing low back pain. Working the lower abdominals can improve your core strength, holding your spine steady as you lift, push, and pull. Increased core strength can also help ease your pain and get you back to your daily activities.

Should I lock my feet when doing a sit up?

Some ways of doing a sit up can hurt your low back. The old way of doing sit-ups with your feet locked

under a bar or held by a partner can be unsafe because it allows your hip flexor muscles to take over if you have weak abdominal muscles. If the hip flexor muscle, which attaches to the front and sides of your lumbar spine, overpowers your abdominal muscles, your low back can hyperextend. Overworking the hip flexors can lead to a muscle imbalance. This can lead to a back problem and may make an existing back problem worse. It is recommended that a “crunch” exercise be used instead. To do this, keep your low back in a safe, mid-line position. Do not secure your feet, and only do a “partial” sit-up. **WJ**

Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the founding physician of Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, is the only doctor in the Triad with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis surgery. He has treated tens of thousands of patients and performed thousands of surgeries since he began practicing in 2002. He completed his training at Cornell University’s prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery, the top-ranked orthopaedics hospital in the U.S.

We’ve Got Your Back



Don’t let a neck or back injury keep you from enjoying life to the fullest. Get expert help fast at Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, the Triad’s only medical practice dedicated exclusively to the spine.

Our specialty center offers:

- Treatment by board-certified, fellowship-trained spine specialists.
- Care for all types of spine problems, from simple backaches to complex injuries and diseases.
- Comprehensive services, including on-site imaging, physical therapy, pain-relieving injections, conservative treatments, second opinions and surgery.

Two locations, including new High Point office



High Point office:
4590 Premier Drive
High Point, NC 27265
(see map at left)

Greensboro office:
2105 Braxton Lane, Suite 101
Greensboro, NC 27408



SPINE & SCOLIOSIS SPECIALISTS

The Triad’s Leader in Spine Care



Same-day appointments available for acute injuries

336-333-6306

www.TriadSpine.com

Thomas R. Saullo, MD
Physiatrist
Fellowship-trained in interventional spine care

Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS
Orthopaedic Spine Surgeon
Fellowship-trained in spine and scoliosis treatment and surgery

Ruben Torrealba, MD
Orthopaedic Spine Surgeon
Fellowship-trained in spine and scoliosis surgery
Fluent in Spanish and English