Embrace Lifelong Wellness

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The greatest wealth is health.”

- VIRGIL

FEATURED ARTICLE

Banish Back Pain

Don’t live with an aching back. Learn five simple exercises to banish low back pain forever.

Read more on page 2

FEATURED ACTIVITY

Screen Out Cancer

Learn what cancer screening tests are available and which ones might be most appropriate for you.

Learn more on page 6

VIDEO COACHING SESSION

Just Breathe: Meditation 101

Intrigued by the benefits of meditation for your health and well-being? Coach Lauren can teach you the basics.

Learn more on page 6
FIVE SIMPLE MOVES TO ELIMINATE LOW BACK PAIN FOR GOOD

Chronic low back pain, which affects millions of Americans each year, is often caused by a sedentary lifestyle and/or heavy use, which might sound a little like you’re darned if you do, and you’re darned if you don’t. But you’re not! There are many treatment options available to low back pain sufferers, ranging from medications to surgery. But one of the most sustainable and effective solutions for eliminating chronic low back pain is the (totally free!) regular practice of back-strengthening exercises.

There are several simple moves that (when practiced often) can reduce and eliminate low back pain by helping prevent weakness from inactivity and improving your body’s ability to tolerate activity as you get older.

The most important muscle groups to target include the back extensors and deep core stabilizers, abdominals, and glutes. It’s also important to keep the upper leg muscles strong and flexible in order to avoid strain on the supporting structures of the back. Movements that target these muscles should focus both on stabilization through the core and building endurance. Here, we outline five of the best moves you can do to keep your back healthy now and down the road.

FIVE STRENGTH EXERCISES TO BEAT BACK PAIN

You can do these moves virtually anywhere to strengthen your back and core and support your lower back. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends doing functional training like these exercises two to three times per week for 20 to 30 minutes per session.

Try moving through the routine below, repeating each exercise 2 to 4 times. To be sure you reap all the back-boosting benefits, pay close attention to your form during every movement.
EXERCISE 1

Decompression Breathing

A little extra O2 can do a body good—especially when you’re lengthening the body at the same time! Use this move to teach yourself how to breathe deeply and keep your spine long and strong at all times.

Stand with your toes touching and your heels slightly apart. Shift weight into your heels, unlock your knees, and gently pull your heels toward each other. Stand tall, reach your arms overhead, and press your fingertips together. With your inhale, lift the ribcage away from the hips. On the exhale, tighten the core to support the “lengthened” spine. Repeat this breathing process until you feel tall and supported.

EXERCISE 2

Founder to Forward Fold

Sticking out your backside might feel embarrassing, but this move is called a founder because it’s setting you up for success in building integrated back and core strength. If a full founder puts too much tension on your lower back, try doing a modified founder with your hands back behind you (pictured below). If you’ve got tight hamstrings, use a prop (such as a chair) to help bring the ground just a wee bit closer to you. Remember—the goal is to reinforce good movement patterns. Use props or modify the full move if it helps you keep a neutral and stable spine.

Modified Founder

From the modified founder position, inhale and reach your arms out in front of your heart, keeping your hips back and pressing your fingertips together, with the pinkies pressing in the hardest. Slowly lift the arms all the way up, and keep the core pulled in to maintain a neutral spine. Hold 15 to 20 seconds.
**Forward Fold**

From full founder, float the hands down to the ground as you drive your hips back. Unlock your knees and keep the weight in your heels. When your hands are down to the ground (or on a prop, for people with tight hamstrings) pull your hips back, up, and away, reaching your hands as far forward as possible to counterbalance. Hold 20 to 30 seconds. To stand up, keep your weight in your heels, slide your hands up your shins, and bring your spine into neutral. Sweep the arms back into Modified Founder position. Press the heels into the ground and bring your hips forward to stand up.

**EXERCISE 3  Adductor-Assisted Back Extension**

This well-known exercise isolates some of the deeper muscles of the lower back. Add in a little extra support from your inner thighs and some increased activation of the hamstrings, and you’ve got a recipe for building back muscles strong like a superhero’s.

Start on the ground, lying on your stomach. Flex your feet and zip your legs together, keeping just a slight bend at the knees. Press your hips and knees into the ground and lift your elbows up until the hands “float” above the ground. Pull your shoulders down towards your butt while lifting your chest off the ground. Keep your neck long and hold the pose for 20 to 30 seconds.

**EXERCISE 4  Eight-Point Plank**

A plank with your elbows and knees on the ground sounds like it should be easy, but this one sure isn’t. Get ready to focus a bit more on your abs to create some serious support for your spine.

Lie on your stomach with your feet flexed, knees touching, and elbows a few inches in front of your shoulders. Pull your shoulders away from your ears, and gently squeeze the knees and elbows toward the centerline of body. Press knees, toes, and elbows into the ground and lift your hips high, keeping your neck long and hold the pose for 20 to 30 seconds.
mat as you lift your hips up to the height of the shoulders. Tighten your core and maintain a long, neutral spine. Pull the elbows and knees toward each other (as though you’re trying to bring the top and bottom of your mat together), and hold the plank for 20 to 30 seconds. If you begin to tremble, you’re doing this right.

**Exercise 5 Woodpecker**

Named after the feisty little bird that tips forward when it hunts for food, this move will strengthen both your butt muscles and your back.

From a lunge position, press through your front heel and stand tall. Lift the back heel up off the ground and reach the arms out in front of your heart. Drive your butt as far back as you can, without moving your knee, until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings. Your arms will naturally reach further forward to counterbalance. Tighten your core, taking care to maintain a neutral spine, and slowly reach the arms overhead. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then repeat on the other side.

**Modified Woodpecker**

If a full woodpecker is too tough, try keeping your arms back behind you in a modified version while you build up the strength to perform the full version.

**The Takeaway**

Research shows that frequently bracing the core and strengthening your back muscles can be effective in promoting long-term relief from chronic low back pain. Meanwhile, sedentary behavior has been shown to be a health risk in and of itself—so next time you catch yourself sitting for a long period of time, stand up and do some Decompression Breathing, a Founder, or any of the exercises outlined above. You’ll give your body a break from sitting, and you’ll be working the muscles that support your spine. With a practice and minimal time commitment, a strong and supple back can be yours for the long haul!
Screen Out Cancer

Cancer screening can be an important step in early detection and can catch many cancers before they start or at least when they are at their earliest, most treatable stages. While experts don’t always agree on the exact tests or schedules people should follow, it’s wise to understand what tests are available so you can talk to your doctor about which ones might be most important for you.

Read up on the cancer screenings you might need to consider, and log when you have talked to your doctor and completed the screens your doctor recommends for you.

FEATURED VIDEO COACHING SESSION

Just Breathe: Meditation 101

With your health and wellness program, you have access to support from experts who can answer questions and provide motivation at your fingertips. Interact with health coaches one-on-one or join one of our live video coaching sessions.

If you’re new to meditation, the term itself may make you a little uneasy or conjure up images of a sitting Buddha. Knowing that meditating has countless benefits to your well-being might have you intrigued, but confused on how to begin. Join Coach Lauren for her video coaching session, Just Breathe: Meditation 101. We will discuss the basics of meditating and review a variety of beginner techniques to help you get started.

Space is limited, so register for your spot now by logging into www.magellanhealth.com/member.

Meditation 101 sessions will be presented live on:

- Thursday, March 19
  12 p.m. (MST)
- Friday, March 20
  12 p.m. (MST)
- Tuesday, March 24
  12 p.m. (MST)