

5. Yoga Therapy for Back Pain By Dr. Aman Sood

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Yoga Therapy for Back Pain; Eighty percent of people develop back pain at some point in their lives due to injury, overuse or disease. Yoga is an excellent therapy for healing sore and injured back muscles, reducing recovery time, preventing re-injury, and reducing the risk of disability from back pain. Yoga helps alleviate lower back pain by strengthening and stretching the muscles of the lower back, reducing inflammation and increasing circulation of blood and prana. Regular yoga practice also improves posture and body mechanics, relieving pain and preventing injury by keeping the spine in proper alignment. In a 1985 survey, 96% of respondents who practiced yoga reported relief from persistent back pain, compared to 23% who were seeing neurosurgeons. Many conditions can cause back pain, and most of these can be helped and treated with a conscious and gentle yoga practice. All cases of moderate to severe back pain need to be evaluated by a medical professional for a correct diagnosis and proper treatment plan. An acute strain can be caused by a trauma, an injury, or by overstretching or overexerting the muscles. A strain produces symptoms of mild to moderate pain, muscle spasms, decreased muscle strength, and reduced range of motion. Chronic strains are usually the result of overuse--prolonged, repetitive movement of the muscles and tendons, and can lead to tendonitis. A gentle practice of spinal lengthening, forward folding and back bending poses will circulate prana and blood to help heal a strained back and alleviate pain. Yoga poses that promote good posture, strengthen the abdominals and stretch the hamstrings will also be helpful. See our complete list of yoga poses for back strain and our posture sequence Backside Blues. A herniated disc occurs when the nuclear pulposus, the inner material of the disc, pushes through a tear in the disc's membrane, and compresses the nerve exiting the spinal cord. Ninety percent of disc herniations occur in the lower two lumbar vertebrae where the spine has the most flexibility. Symptoms of a herniated disc include: pain in back and/or leg; stiffness, numbness, weakness or tingling in leg or back; and/or shooting pain down leg. With a posterior (backside) disc herniation, back bends will help reduce inflammation and help press the nucleus back into the disk. You want to choose back bends that focus on the low back like cobra, camel, and bridge pose. Forward bends are contraindicated. See our complete list of yoga poses for disc herniation. Sciatica occurs when the sciatic nerve becomes compressed, most commonly due to a herniated disk in the lower lumbar spine. Inflammation, stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal) and tight piriformis muscles (deep muscles in the buttocks) are other common causes of sciatica. Compression of the sciatic nerve can cause one sided numbness, tingling or pain in the sacrum, buttock and back of the leg. See our Yoga Therapy for Sciatica page for further information including poses, sequences, pranayama, books and articles. Spondylolisthesis is a condition when a vertebra slips forward over a lower vertebra due to a congenital defect or fracture. It usually affects either the fourth or the fifth lumbar vertebra in the lower back. In some instances, this may lead to spinal cord or nerve root compression, back pain, and numbness or weakness in the legs. The low back pain that results from Spondylolisthesis can be reduced by first by gently stretching the hamstrings and then by slowly strengthening the back muscles and abdominal muscles. You also want to choose postures that focus on good spinal alignment. Back bends are contraindicated and postures that combine twisting and forward bending are not recommended. In forward bends, keep the back flat and long. Avoid any pose that creates or aggravates back pain. See our complete list of yoga poses for Spondylolisthesis. Bone and joint diseases (osteoporosis, ankylosing, osteoarthritis) can cause degeneration, bone fractures, stenosis, inflammation and spinal nerve compression. For osteoporosis, weight bearing yoga poses can be used to build bone mass and to help stabilize the bones and joints. All forward bends, twists and side bending poses are contraindicated for anyone with osteoporosis. See our Yoga Therapy for Arthritis page for further information on using yoga to treat osteoarthritis and Ankylosing Spondylitis. General Guidelines for an acute phase of pain, yoga is not appropriate for 48 hours or until the acute period passes. If a yoga pose causes any pain, tingling, or numbness, stop immediately. Move into the poses slowly and gently; use long hold times and practice slow deep breathing in the poses. Any movements that increase your symptoms should be avoided. End with a long Shavasana with bolster under knees and/or a folded blanket under the low back to support the low back. Severe pain lasting more than a few days without improvement requires medical attention. Anyone having difficulty passing urine; numbness in the back or genital area; numbness, tingling, or weakness in the legs; shooting pain down the leg; or unsteadiness when standing should seek immediate medical attention.