

# Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Back pain is a very common complaint; in fact 80% of the population will suffer from back pain at some time during their life. Causes of back pain are varied and complex and therefore require individual diagnosis by a health professional. However a large percentage of back pain can be cured by working the deep stabilizing muscles, increasing flexibility, muscular strength and reducing mental stress.

Let's look at things we can do each day to improve back health after getting the go ahead from a health professional:

## **Deep Stabilizing Muscles**

These are the transverses abdominis, multifidus, diaphragm and pelvic floor muscles and they all work together to stabilize and protect the lumbar spine. To work these muscles, start by drawing the lower abdomen in. If you are unable to isolate the lower abdomen, then draw the navel in towards the spine and then try pulling the lower tummy in. This should be done as you exhale so that the diaphragm is raised and away from the tummy. At the same time, draw up the pelvic floor muscles. Now you have switched on those deep-stabilizing muscles. Don't forget to breathe. Practice several times a day and always maintain good posture while practicing.

## **Increasing Flexibility**

Tight lower back muscles and tight hamstring muscles can contribute to back pain. Try the "sit and reach" test: sitting with legs stretched out in front of you, see if you can reach your toes. If not, then you need to work on your flexibility. Try putting a strap or belt around your feet if you can't reach, and hold onto this. Sitting up straight, gently pull the chest as far forward as you can and hold this for at least 20 seconds, then try pulling the upper body further forward and again hold for 20 seconds. You will get better results when the body is warm.

## **Increasing Muscular Strength**

As well as working the deep stabilizing muscles you can also work the retus abdominis by performing some abdominal crunches. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet close to your bottom. Lengthen the back of the neck so that your chin is close enough to the chest to hold a small apple under it. Support your head with your hands. As you exhale, lift the upper body and flatten the tummy. Come up as high as you can and hold it for a second or two, then slowly lower down and relax the tummy. Work slowly, about 2 seconds up and 2 down. Do as many as you can. If this feels uncomfortable then ask your instructor to check your technique.

## **Reducing Mental Stress**

There are many books and courses on this subject. Different methods work for each of us. However a daily relaxation of your choice is bound to reduce stress. So take some time out for yourself each day doing something you like to do that you personally find relaxing.

Yours in health,

*Jeni*