

The Back-Saving Workout 7 Minutes to a Healthier Spine

CAT-CAMEL

Although this back exercise plan is designed to improve the endurance of your stabilizing muscles, it's important to begin your workout by slowly flexing and extending your spine in small ranges of motion to prepare it for the moves that follow. Keep in mind, this exercise isn't a stretch. So don't push at the end of each movement.



How to do it: Get down on your hands and knees with your hands shoulder-width apart. Slowly lower your head between your arms as you push up as high as you can with your back, rounding your spine. When you reach the top of the movement, slowly lower your back as you lift your head up, extend your neck forward and up, and arch your lower back by moving your belly button toward the floor. That's one repetition. Remember; move back and forth slowly without pushing at either end of the movement. Do five to eight repetitions.

CURL-UP

This exercise forces you to work your entire abdominal muscle complex while keeping your lower back in its naturally arched position. The move minimizes stress on your spine while increasing the endurance of the muscles.



How to do it: Lie face up on the floor with your left leg straight and flat on the floor. Your right knee should be bent and your right foot flat. Place your hands palms down on the floor underneath the natural arch in your lower back. (Don't flatten your back.) Slowly raise your head and shoulders off the floor without bending your lower back or spine, and hold this position for 7 to 8 seconds, breathing deeply the entire time. That's one repetition. Do four repetitions, then switch legs so that your right leg is straight and your left is bent.

Advanced move: Try raising your elbows off the floor as you curl up. For an even greater challenge, start by contracting your abs, and then curl up against that force.

Side Bridge

You'll work your lateral stabilizers-muscles that are crucial in ensuring that your spine is fully supported-by assuming a body position that puts them at a disadvantage and forces them to work harder than normal.



How to do it: Lie on your left side with your knees straight and your upper body propped up on your left elbow and forearm. Place your right hand on your left shoulder and slowly raise your hips until your body forms a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Hold this position for 7 to 8 seconds, breathing deeply the entire time. Do four or five repetitions, then switch to your right side.

BIRD DOG

This exercise works your lower- and middle-back extensors-the muscles that help you bend backward-while producing half the stress on your spine that conventional back-extensor exercises such as the "Superman" (simultaneous leg and arm lifting) create.



How to do it: Get down on your hands and knees with your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Slowly raise and straighten your right leg and left arm at the same time. Hold that position for 7 to 8 seconds, breathing deeply throughout the exercise. Lower your arm and leg straight down, and then sweep them along the floor back into the starting position. That's one repetition. Perform four repetitions, and then switch sides.

Read more at Men's Health:

<http://www.menshealth.com/fitness/back-exercise-4#ixzz1yIQIUyqD>