

Chronic lower back pain: Exercises

These exercises are the 20 percent of exercises that we use in the Pilates Republic which get 80 percent of positive results with lower back pain. Put another way, 80 percent of people who get out of pain by using exercise, use these few exercises to do so.

If you don't have lower back pain, FANTASTIC, these exercises are also the way we warm up and build strength in the muscles of the core so they act as an awesome home workout.

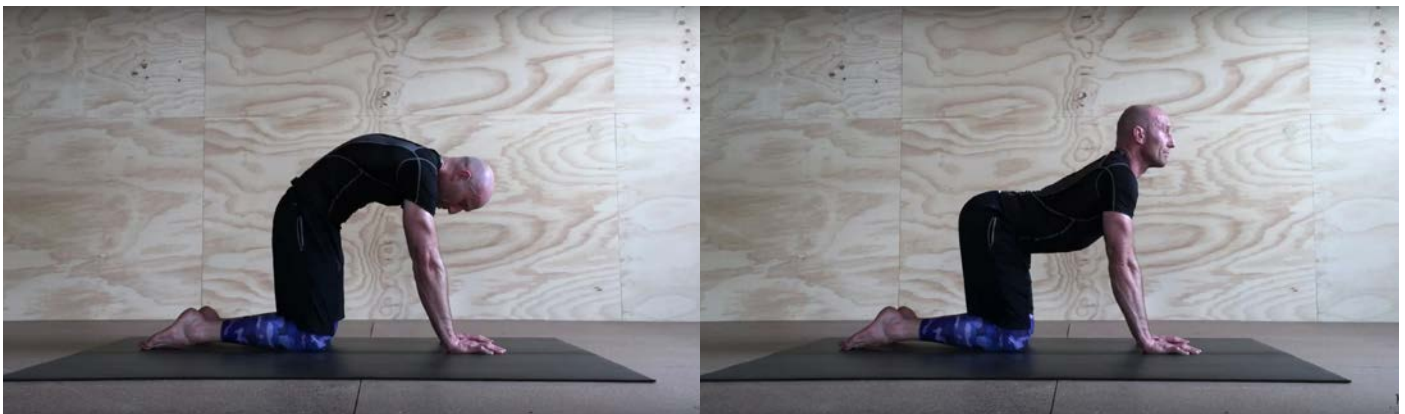
Cat Stretch

This is often called cat and cow or cat and camel but I always wonder which is which. We call it cat stretch, or turtle back and cobra spine. In essence we are flexing (rounding) the spine and extending (arching) the spine.

Hands under the shoulders, knees under the hips.

Rounding your back and then arching your back.

Do a few, settle into the movement and as you do, start to work into the positions.



One of the things that we really emphasize in the Pilates Republic is not just 'making shapes' against gravity but making shapes and engaging your muscles around them wilfully. In this position, rather than just holding myself against the weight of my body and gravity, I'm actually gripping my arms and lengthening them down onto the floor.

I'm pushing down with my shins, I'm sucking my belly crease in, I'm squeezing my bum, rounding my back and then going the other way, doing the same sort of thing. I'm looking to squeeze the muscles in my lower back, squeeze the shoulder blades down my ribs, lift my chest up and push down through my arms. Round the back, arch the back, rounding and arching.

The spine goes into the body, or extends, then it fattens, it curls up and at the top, again, it extends or arches into the body.

Hip Rolls

Essentially the same movement as cat stretch but lying on your back.

Your knees are bent, your feet are flat, a little bit wider than hip distance.

Arms by your side or overhead draw your belly into your body and flatten the lower back.

Press into your heels and peel up along the spine, up onto the shoulder blades.

On the floor I'm arching my back again, this time with my butt and shoulders on the ground.



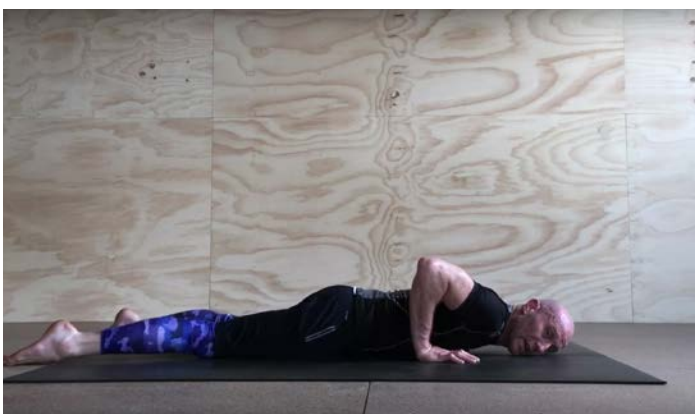
Cobra push up

Fingertips are roughly around your armpits, legs are floppy, hips are floppy, belly is floppy.

Shoulders draw down your back and you press up and down.

Keep your bum, abdomen and legs (everything but your arms) relaxed and soft.

Easier said than done.



It's really common, in fact just about normal, for there to be tightness or crankiness in the lower back in this exercise. If that tightness or crankiness is kind of tiptoeing into being pain, just post on the elbows and hold that for about a minute.



Almost without exception, at around the 20 second, 30 second mark, that crankiness will dissipate, you press up a little higher, finish the minute, lie down, take a few breaths.

Once you feel ready, try again for the cobra push up. Remember the crankiness almost always dissipates after 6-8 repetitions if you are relaxing your butt and abdomen.

The body hollow position or dish, taken from gymnastics

Lie on your back. Bring your thighs together and take your feet just off the ground. Press your inner thighs together.

Pull your belly in, keep the back flat (If you can't keep your back flat, bend your knees and keep your thighs vertical until your strength develops).

Lower back flat, your abs in, no crankiness in the spine.

Pressing your thighs together, heels pressing together, toes pointed. Squeeze your bum.

Squeezing your belly in, arms by your side, pushing towards your toes. You'll feel your chest muscles on, your back muscles pushing your arms down. Basically trying to grip every muscle in your body, lower back flat on the floor, until you need to rest.

Abdominals drawing in, butt squeezing. It's the same shape in your body as this plank. Again, you're not just making the shape versus gravity using just these muscles. You're gripping your inner thighs, squeezing your bum, reaching through your arms so the chest and back are supporting you as well. Working the whole system around the shape. Hold that for thirty second rounds, five times. You'll be good and warm. Your abs, your glutes, your inner thighs, your chest, your back will be good and worked. That's the hollow position.



If you are really struggling to get the position, flip yourself round and do a front plank applying all the same actions and the arms from your cat stretch (push down into the floor so your ribcage goes up)



If you do the front plank it should like the photo above. NOT like either of the photos below.



Side plank

There's a lot of evidence that supports symmetry from side to side. I'd strongly suggest that you start holding the side plank you can hold, let's say, for thirty seconds to a minute. If you start on the forearm, bent knees, thighs together, great.

Hold it for thirty seconds to a minute until you need to stop. Change sides, other side. Check which one is weaker. Let's say my left side is weaker. I do my left side first, I time it, I get forty- five seconds. I know I can do fifty five seconds on my right. It doesn't matter. Hold forty five. Let the left catch up to the right and the right come down to the left.

Once you've got them working evenly you should start working toward a straight arm-straight leg side plank.



Arching the body so that the side of the body which you're working on really works. The muscles shorten and rip. This side lengthens, almost stretching. Hold it. Hold it until you need to change. Change sides.

Make the shape, grip the muscles, hold it until you need to rest.

60 seconds really gripping the muscles around the shape is a good effort.

Arch position

We've done the front plank, the hollow dish, the side planks, and now the back of your body. We're going to do two positions for the back of your body. If you make this booklet into a routine, I suggest you do both. That way you're working the back of the body a bit more than the front of the body. That's generally a good thing. We'll start with the arch position.

Lie flat.

Press the hips down.

Lift the thighs.

Lift the chest.

You can use the hands by the arm pits and settle the body into this lift. Then the hands by your side.

Keep the knees relatively straight.

Lift the chest.



Take the arms up and long in front.

Try not to lift the chin and compress the back of the neck. If anything, keep the chin down. Long and neutral in the back of the neck. Lifting from the shoulders and hips.

As long as your hip creases, front of the belly, pubic bone are pushing down, thighs lifting and long, shoulders lifting the chest, shouldn't be much in the lower back. If there is, it means you're compressing the lower back by lifting too much with the lower back muscles. If you can't get away from that lower back feeling, just come back to that exercise when you've done a lot more of the cobra push up, the cat stretch.

The (bent leg) bridge

Sit on your butt.

Hands by your side (with fingertips forward, it's a bit stretchier in the pecs. Fingertips back, it's a bit stretchier in the biceps)

Do 10 reps.



The straight leg back plank

Thighs connected, like the other positions.
Toes are going to reach for the floor.
Adjust your hands as you need to.
Lifting to a straight body. Lift your chest. Lift your hips
Press down with your arms
Lift with the thighs.



As you settle into that position, you'll feel very quickly all the muscles in the back of your body working. It's a fantastic exercise.

Squat

I'm going to talk about squatting. Squatting's an incredibly important human function.

There's lots of ways of squatting, and there's lots of uses for squatting. I'm just going to cover some basic principles for using your body weight as your squatting resistance. We're not talking about a barbell squat, or a kettlebell squat at this point.

Just talking about using your body to squat in a way that will get you on a chair or a toilet more effectively.

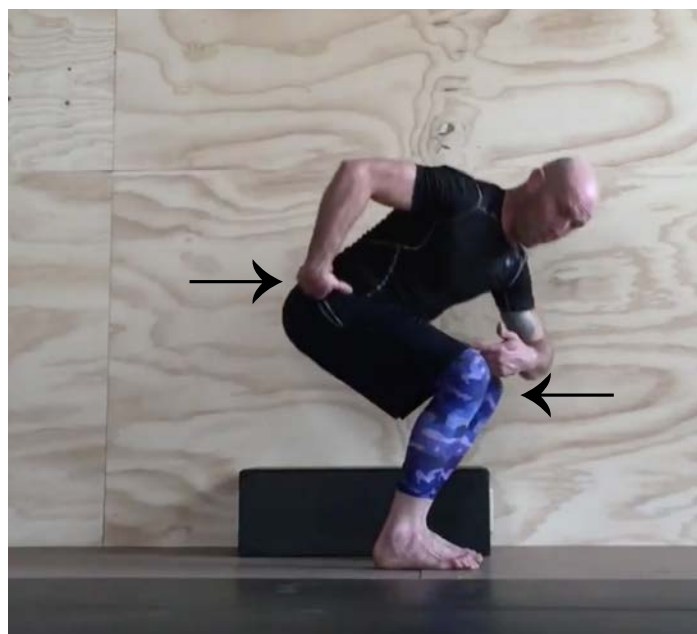
Knees through toes. Hips and knees bend together.

When you squat, your knees want to go through second and third toe, like there's laser beams from your knees that shoot through the line of the second and third toe.

You can use a mirror to practice that, or you can just look down and see it happen.



In the side view hips and knees bend together.



Put them together, knees through toes, hips and knees bend together. Pretty simple.

A couple of details to add to that is that sometimes people aggravate their back by gripping the lower back muscles, and sticking their tailbone 'up'. You can see in the photo above that my lower back is very close to flat. The flattening of your back and drawing info your belly will help to make your butt muscles fire.

So thats the basics of lower back recovery (via exercise) and also some of the most effective exercises for strengthening you core muscles.

Pilates Republic classes and courses will deepen your understanding of these principles and introduce you to more complex movements while increasing your strength and flexibility in a range of other ways.

Chronic Lower Back Pain Video 1

Chronic Lower Back Pain Video 2

Chronic Lower Back Pain Video 3

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