

## Staying Active with Back or Neck Pain

### Self-care at home

*This handout gives exercises to help improve movement and lessen pain in your back and neck.*

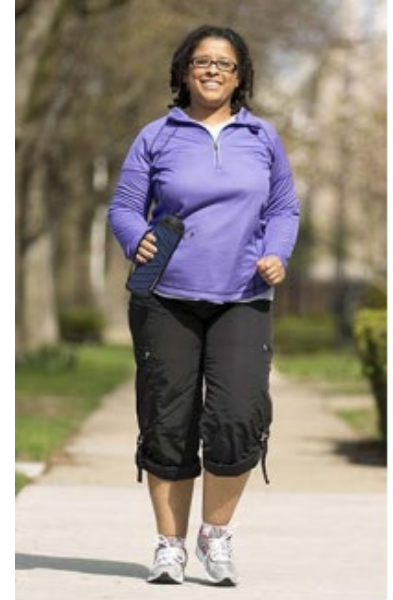
### How will exercise help my low back pain?

The exercises in this handout will retrain your muscles to help ease stress on your back and neck, lessen pain, and improve movement.

### What do I need to do?

Work with your provider to create a home exercise program that includes doing the exercises in this handout. While doing your exercises, please note that:

- These exercises should **not** cause pain. If you have sharp pain when you do an exercise, **stop** doing it. Wait until the next day and try again.
- If you have more soreness or swelling a few hours after your exercises or the next morning, it may mean that you overdid it. If this happens, you can:
  - Do the exercise fewer times a day.
  - Do fewer repetitions (reps) of the exercise. For instance, if it says to do the exercise 20 times, just do 10 reps instead and see how you feel.



*Following a home exercise program can help lessen pain and improve recovery.*



*Sitting like this will increase your lower back pain.*



*Sitting like this may help ease your lower back pain.*

## Posture

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A lot of back and neck pain can be eased by changing the way you sit during the day. For best posture when sitting:

- Keep your lower back in a neutral position. To do this, hold your belly button in and sit up straight.
- Keep your shoulder blades **gently** drawn down and back, as if you were trying to reach them down to your buttocks.
- Hold your head up straight, in line with your shoulders (see the bottom photo on the left).
- Sit with your back against the back rest of your chair whenever possible.

Your goal is to be in this position throughout the day, as your muscle strength improves.

If you cannot sit with good posture at your desk, move your computer screen, keyboard, or other devices to support your posture. Do **not** change your good posture to do your work. See the handout, "Workstation Ergonomics" for instructions.

## Exercises

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### Abdominal Brace

- Lie on your back on a table or the floor. Bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the surface.
- Place your fingers just inside the bones on the front of your pelvis (see photo below). As you breathe out, gently pull in the muscles under your fingers in as if tightening a belt. This should be a small movement. Make sure to pull your belly in. Do not push it up.
- Hold for 3 seconds, then release.
- Repeat 3 sets of 10 reps. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.



*Gently pull your muscles in as you breathe out in this exercise.*

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## Glute Sets

“Glute” is short for *gluteal* muscles. These are the muscles in your buttocks.

- Lie on your back on a table or the floor. Rest your arms and hands at your sides.
- Tighten your buttock muscles.
- Hold for 5 seconds, then release.
- Do not hold your breath or arch your back when you tighten your muscles.
- Repeat 3 sets of 10 reps. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.



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## Cat/Cow

- Kneel on the floor or a table, with your hands on the surface in front of you. Make sure your hands are right under your shoulders and your knees are under your hips.
- First, slowly round your back to the ceiling (see top photo).
- Then, slowly let your back sag toward the ground (see bottom photo).
- Focus on moving your lower back. Move only as far as you can without pain.
- Repeat this movement 20 times. If you get tired before doing all the reps, stop.



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## Chin Tuck Exercise

- Stand or sit with your shoulders relaxed (see top photo). You may find it easier to start with your shoulders and head against a wall.
- Tuck your chin down slightly so that your ear moves back over your shoulder (see bottom photo).
- Repeat this movement 20 times. If you get tired before doing all the reps, then stop.



### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.