

## Back Care Yoga Sequence

Both strength and flexibility are key elements in relieving or preventing low-back pain. Practice this yoga sequence regularly to help you:

1. Warm up the lower back.
2. Stretch essential muscle groups.
3. Strengthen the legs and back.
4. Increase flexibility in the spine and legs.
5. Rest and support the back with a relaxing pose.

**Disclaimer:** *This program is not a substitute for medical advice. Remember to move slowly. To reduce the risk of injury, never force or strain. If you are experiencing back or leg pain now or during the practice, if you have known disc problems (like hernias or degeneration), or if you are pregnant, we recommend you consult with your doctor before beginning this or any additional movement program.*

### Preparing for your practice:

- **Breathe slowly and deeply** through your nose for the duration of the practice. Deep, gradual breathing helps to release muscular tension.
- **Move slowly and with intention.** Stretching tight muscles first and then strengthening weak muscles will help improve physical function and increase flexibility of the spine.
- **Work toward consistency!** Practice these six poses daily, starting with the first and working your way through to the last one, to help manage back pain, improve flexibility and prevent future flare-ups.



### Knee to Chest Pose (Apanasana)

**Benefits:** Releases tension in the lower back. May be helpful for sciatic nerve pain.

**Caution:** May be some discomfort for those with tight hips or knee issues. Do not do this pose after your second trimester of pregnancy.

1. Start by lying on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor.
2. Draw your belly button down toward the floor, then raise one knee at a time and lift your feet off the floor.
3. Now hug both knees toward your chest as you lengthen your lower back. Breathe deeply for 5 breaths.



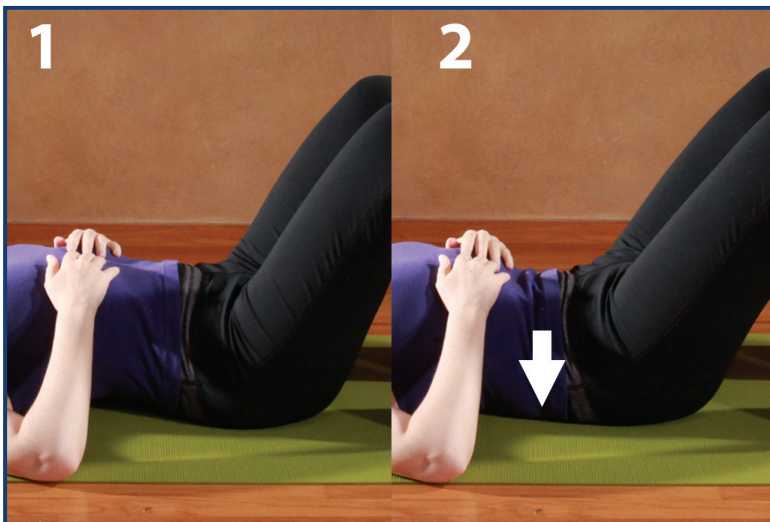
**Reclined Big Toe Pose  
(Supta Padangusthasana)**

**Benefits:** Relieves backache and sciatica. Stretches hips, thighs, hamstrings, groin, and calves; strengthens the knees.

**Caution:** If you have high blood pressure: raise your head and neck on a folded blanket.

**Prop:** Strap

1. Start by lying on your back with a strap nearby.
2. Keeping your left knee bent place the sole of your left foot onto the floor. Draw your right knee into your torso, looping the strap over your right foot. Straighten your leg now, and press your right heel up toward the ceiling.
3. While holding the strap in each hand, take a breath in and as you exhale, move your elbows away from each other, creating more of a stretch in the back of your leg. As your elbows bend and reach toward the sides of the room, continue to extend through your right heel and breathe deeply. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
4. Repeat on the other side.



**Pelvic Tilts**

**Benefits:** Pelvic tilts are comprised of very *subtle* movements that strengthen the muscles of the low back, increase flexibility and lengthen the lower spine.

**Caution:** After the fourth month of pregnancy, tilts should be done in a standing position, against the wall.

1. Lie on your back with the knees bent and the soles of the feet on the floor. This is your neutral position, with the natural curve of your lumbar spine causing your low back to be slightly elevated from the floor. Inhale in this neutral position.
2. As you exhale, allow the belly to move down toward the spine and gently tilt your pelvis towards your head. Keep your hips on the floor and feel your low back **stretching toward the floor**, taking the natural curve out of your low back. To help with this subtle movement, imagine your lower belly as a bowl of water. As you tilt the pelvis toward your head, the water spills toward your navel.
3. Inhale and return to your neutral position. Repeat this movement 5 to 10 times.

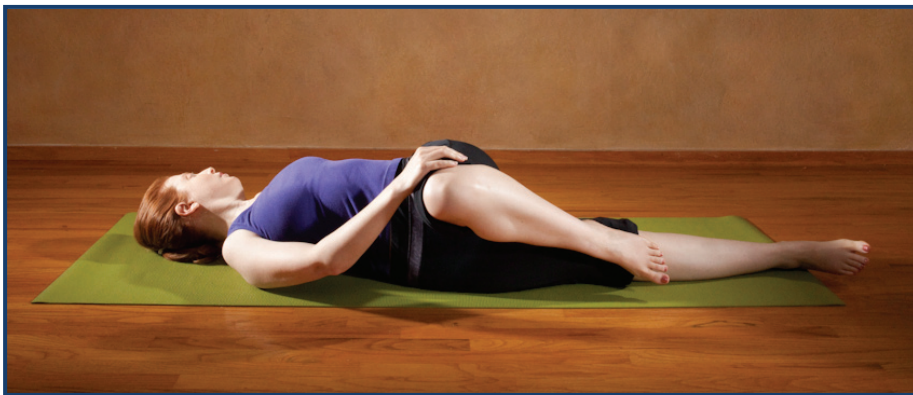


### Bridge Pose

**Benefits:** Reduces anxiety, fatigue, backache, headache, and insomnia

**Caution:** If you have a neck injury, avoid this pose unless you are practicing under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

1. Start by lying on your back with your knees bent and the soles of your feet on the floor.
2. Place your arms down by your sides with your palms facing the floor.
3. As you exhale, press your feet and arms actively into the floor, then push your tailbone upward firming (but not hardening) your buttocks, as you lift your pelvis off the floor.
4. Raise your buttocks upward as your thighs become active and strong; imagine you are holding a ball between your thighs that you must hold and not let drop to the floor. Keep your knees directly over your heels, and direct them forward, away from your hips.
5. Keep the head neutral and draw your chest toward your chin.
6. Stay in the pose anywhere from 30 seconds to 1 minute. Release with an exhalation, rolling your upper, middle and then lower back slowly down, one vertebra at a time, onto the floor. If it is uncomfortable for you to hold this posture for 30 seconds, start with 10-20 seconds and build.



### Supine Spinal Twist (Supta Matsyendrasana)

**Benefits:** Stretches and relaxes the spine, may help relieve low back pain.

**Caution:** If you have a spine injury, or degenerative disk disease: perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher.

1. While lying on your back, extend your right leg onto the floor and bend your left knee, placing your left foot on your right knee with your left knee pointed toward the ceiling. Inhale and place your left arm on the floor at shoulder height with the palm touching the floor.
2. Exhale and slowly move your left knee over to the right side, gently twisting your spine and low back. Rest your right hand on your left knee adding more weight for gravity to gently help your knee down. Note: knee does not have to touch the floor. Turn your head and look over to the left.
3. Try to keep both shoulders on the floor, close your eyes, and relax into the posture. Let gravity help your knee down, so you do not have to use any effort. Breathe and hold for 6-10 breaths. To release: inhale and roll your left hip back to the floor. Then exhale bringing your left leg back down to the floor. Repeat other side.



**Restorative Asana**  
**(Supported legs on a chair)**

**Benefits:** Relieves backache and calms the mind.

**Caution:** With serious neck or back problems only perform this pose with the supervision of an experienced teacher.

**Prop:** One chair

1. Sit on the floor in front of a chair with the seat of the chair towards you. Turn sideways with one hip facing the chair. As you start to lay back, carefully swing your legs up and your body around so your buttocks are towards the chair. Rest your legs onto the chair's seat, making sure they are completely supported from the backs of the knees down to the feet.
2. Lie here for 10 minutes. Close your eyes, let your thoughts settle and surrender to the stillness. If it is uncomfortable for you to hold this posture for 10 minutes, hold it for as long as you can and aim to gradually build up to 10 minutes.
3. To come out of the pose: draw your legs into the body, toward your chest, and roll to one side. Lie on your side for a few breaths then slowly push your hands into the floor to come up to a seated position.

**There's More!**

We encourage you to continue your practice of gentle yoga beyond this tip sheet. To practice, try one or more of these helpful resources:

1. Visit [www.HillPhysicians.com](http://www.HillPhysicians.com) to take advantage of our free tools designed to help you relax, manage stress, and achieve balance in mind and body. These include:
  - Our **Chair Yoga** audio podcast or slideshow, along with a tip sheet to make practice easier. While you are there, check out the entire collection of health podcasts, each available for free download at [www.HillPhysicians.com/podcasts](http://www.HillPhysicians.com/podcasts).
  - Our Back Pain Resource Center, available at [www.HillPhysicians.com/BackPain](http://www.HillPhysicians.com/BackPain). Discover numerous resources to help you prevent a future flare-ups of back pain.
2. Attend a yoga class in your community at a discounted price! Contact **Member Health Improvement** at **(800) 445-5747** or [health@hpmg.com](mailto:health@hpmg.com) to find a local yoga provider in your area for a 15% discount on community classes (*Hill Physicians members only*).