



Stronger Core, Healthier Back: A Smarter Approach to Beating Back Pain

Why Rest Isn't the Cure — And What to Do Instead

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Think about the last time you went to your family doctor with a complaint of pain. If you experienced that pain while lifting a barbell, there's a good chance the doc uttered these words, "**I recommend not lifting for a few weeks.**" Sound familiar?

It's true many find some short-term relief of their symptoms by following these orders. It makes sense on paper. If deadlifting causes your back to hurt, not deadlifting will likely decrease your pain! Problem solved right?

Wrong.

And yes, taking a break can help the pain go away in the short term. If something hurts when you do it, not doing it will probably feel better... for now. But here's the thing:

Pain relief is not the same as fixing the problem.

If you don't address *why* your back started hurting in the first place, the pain often comes back. Again. And again.

Here's What's Actually Going On

Your body has a group of muscles around your spine and stomach area. These are often called your **core** muscles. They're kind of like the support system or "control center" of your body. When they're working together properly, they help you move safely—whether that's lifting something heavy or just going up the stairs.

But when these muscles aren't doing their job, your back has to take on too much of the load. That's when problems start.

What is 'core stability?'

Think of your body like a music band. Every muscle is a musician. When they all play in tune, everything works beautifully. But if just one instrument is out of sync, the whole performance can fall apart.

That's what happens in your body when your core muscles aren't working together—your spine gets overloaded, and pain or injury can happen.

Core **stability** means your muscles are strong and steady enough to protect your spine and help you move with control. But here's something important:



💡 **You don't need endless crunches or sit-ups to build a strong core. In fact, they might make things worse.**

What Works Better?

Instead of focusing on movement-heavy exercises (like crunches or back extensions), it's better to start with **simple, steady exercises** that train your core to *hold steady* and work together.

These are called **isometric exercises**, which means the muscles are working, but you're not moving a lot. They build endurance and coordination—two key ingredients for reducing pain and preventing future injuries.

Start with These Core Exercises: McGill's Big 3

Dr. Stuart McGill is a leading expert in back health, and he recommends starting with these three exercises that work your entire core without irritating your spine:

1. Modified Curl-Up

- Lie on your back with one leg straight and one knee bent.
- Place your hands under your lower back.
- Gently lift your head and shoulders just an inch or two off the ground.
- Hold for 10 seconds, then relax.
- **Why it works:** Trains your front core muscles without straining your back.



2. Side Plank (Modified)

- Lie on your side with knees bent, propped up on your elbow.
- Raise your hips so you're supported by your knee and elbow.
- Hold for 10 seconds, then rest.
- Do both sides!
- **Why it works:** Strengthens the muscles on the side of your body, including the glutes.



3. Bird Dog

- Start on all fours (hands and knees).
- Gently lift one arm and the opposite leg at the same time.
- Keep your back still—don't let it arch or twist.
- Hold for 10 seconds, then switch sides.
- **Why it works:** Builds coordination and teaches your core how to support movement.



 Do each exercise using a “5-3-1” pattern:

- 5 reps of 10-second holds
- Rest
- 3 reps of 10-second holds
- Rest
- 1 final rep of 10-second hold

Don't Forget Mobility

Before doing the Big 3, warm up your spine with a gentle stretch called the **Cat-Cow**:

- Get on hands and knees.
- Arch your back up like a cat, then gently lower it like a cow looking forward.

- Repeat 5-6 times—just enough to wake things up.

Also, make sure your **hips and upper back** move well. If they're stiff, your lower back has to do too much. That leads to overuse and, you guessed it, more pain.

Wake Up Those Glutes! (Yes, Your Butt Matters)

Sometimes, back pain happens because your glute muscles (the ones in your butt) aren't working well. When that happens, your hamstrings or low back try to pick up the slack.

Try these exercises to reactivate your glutes:

Glute Bridge

- Lie on your back with knees bent.
- Squeeze your glutes first, then lift your hips up.
- Hold for 5-10 seconds.
- Do 2 sets of 20 reps.

Squat Hold with Glute Squeeze

- Hold a weight in front of you and squat down.
- Push your knees out and feel the side of your hips working.
- Rise a little, squeeze your glutes hard, and hold for 5 seconds.
- Do 1-2 sets of 5 reps.



A Few Final Tips

- ☒ Don't do these exercises right after getting out of bed—your spine is more vulnerable in the morning. Wait a bit and go for a short walk first.
- ☒ Build up slowly. Start with what feels manageable and increase as your strength improves.

☒ Walk daily! Walking is one of the best things you can do for your spine. Aim for 10 minutes, 3 times a day, at a pace that gets your arms swinging.

Final Thoughts

Back pain doesn't mean you're broken. You just need a smarter plan—one that helps your body get stronger, more stable, and more in sync. These simple exercises can be the first step.

Whether you're rehabbing from pain or just trying to move better, think of your core as your body's control center. When it's working well, everything else follows.

