

# Back Cure

## Introduction

Back pain is an ongoing epidemic. From missed work to wasted time and money on phony cures, the costs run into the tens of billions annually. And what of the so-called cures? If you are lucky, time and money are all that are lost. At worst, following dangerous spinal reconstruction, you can be rendered permanently disabled and much worse off.

What is the answer? Well, I have suffered from low back pain all my life. I am also an orthopedic surgeon with an extensive background in sports medicine. I have come to realize over the years, while treating myself in addition to countless patients, that the vast majority of us with back pain can cure it based upon a simple principle. Read on and learn how you can be free of back pain forever.

## The Problem

When we are born, our lower back is straight. If we continued crawling, instead of learning to stand upright and walk, back pain would not be a major health problem (our wrists would sure suffer though). But we stand and walk, and with that the progressive deformity in the lower back called *lordosis* or sway back begins.

Look at most people standing upright and you will see the belly out and the back swayed inward. I call this the slouch position. We maintain it while standing and while sitting. It is a result of a muscle imbalance.

The muscles in the lower back, called the *erector spinae muscles*, are thick and strong. There are some other cross beam muscles called *the internal and external obliques*. Together, I call these muscles the *spinal extensors (Fig. 1)*.



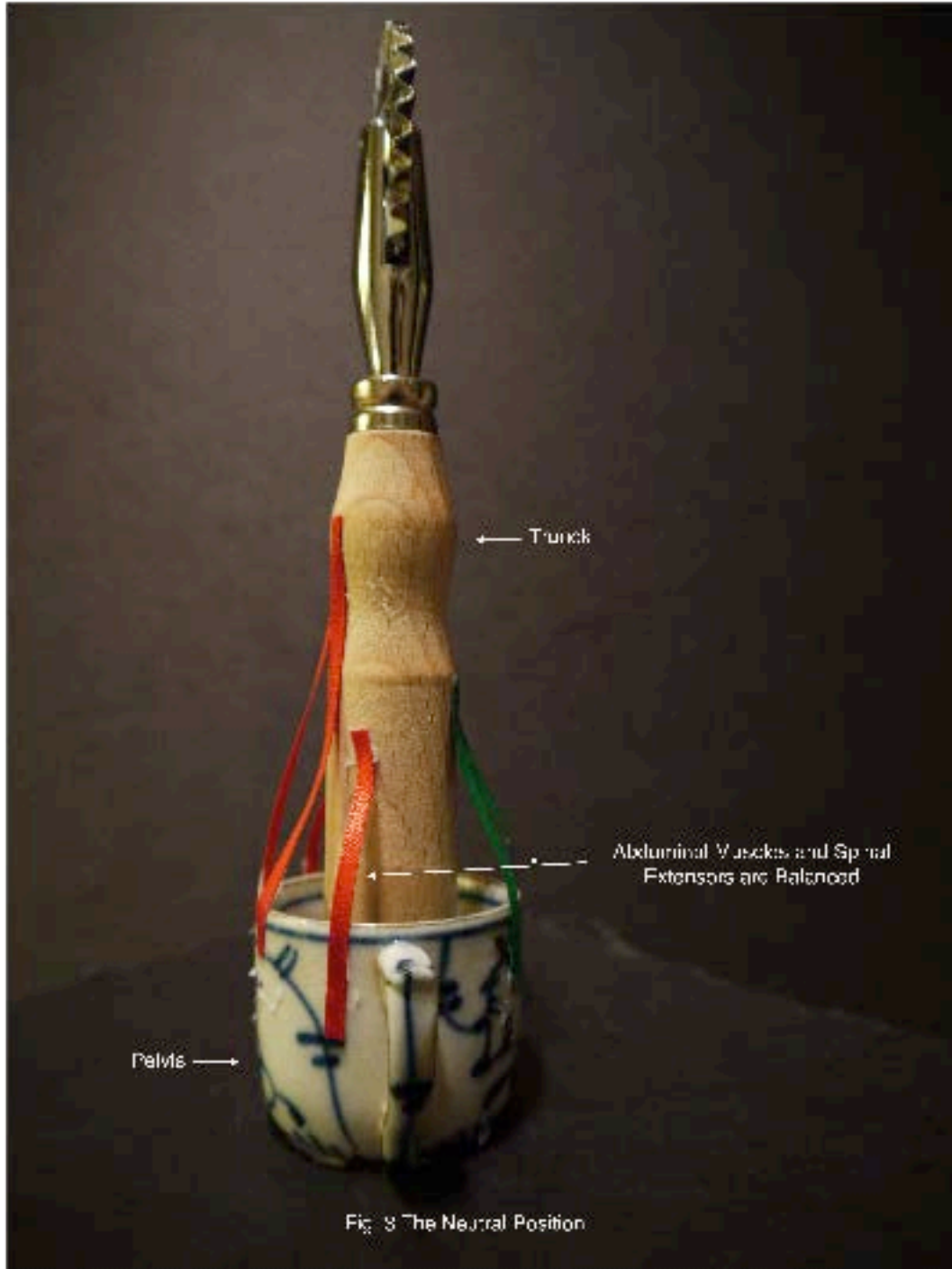
The spinal extensors help to hold the spine up but at the expense of curving the lower spine back to balance the body over the pelvis. Think of the low back as a bow and the spinal extensors as the bowstring. In front, the abdominal muscles become stretched and weak, overpowered by the stronger back muscles. *It is easier to tilt the pelvis forward and sway back than to maintain neutral balance between the pelvis and lower back in the erect position – the slouch position (Fig. 2).*



Slouching puts tremendous stress on the lower back joints, the **facet joints**, holding the vertebrae together. This results in a type of arthritis that causes chronic low back pain, a condition known as **Facet Syndrome**.

### **The Cure**

Low back pain can be overcome by attacking the root of the problem. The problem, the key to curing chronic low back pain, is the imbalance between the strong muscles of the lower back and the weaker abdominal muscles in front. By reversing this imbalance you can change the dynamic position of your lower back and pelvis - you can free yourself from slouching, free yourself from chronic pain. The goal is to reach and maintain a balanced, neutral position of the lower back in relation to the pelvis (**Fig. 3**).



The first and most important goal in overcoming the muscle imbalance of your lower back is to stretch out and lengthen the extensor muscles of the lower back. There are two stretching techniques that must be mastered. Both can be done sitting on the floor. You don't need any fancy equipment or expensive trainer. The best time to stretch is when your body is warm. This can be after light exercise, a vigorous walk, or a hot bath or shower.

For the first stretch, your starting position is sitting with feet together. Place your hands under your calves. Bend forward, head down, tucking your chin in, pulling your lower trunk to your thighs. You must keep your legs flat and your head down. You should feel tension develop in the middle of your lower back. As soon as you feel tension, stop and hold your position, exhale slowly and count to 20, and then relax. You should repeat the stretch several times times. Spend about five minutes doing this stretch. The key to a good stretch is the hold **(Fig. 4)**.

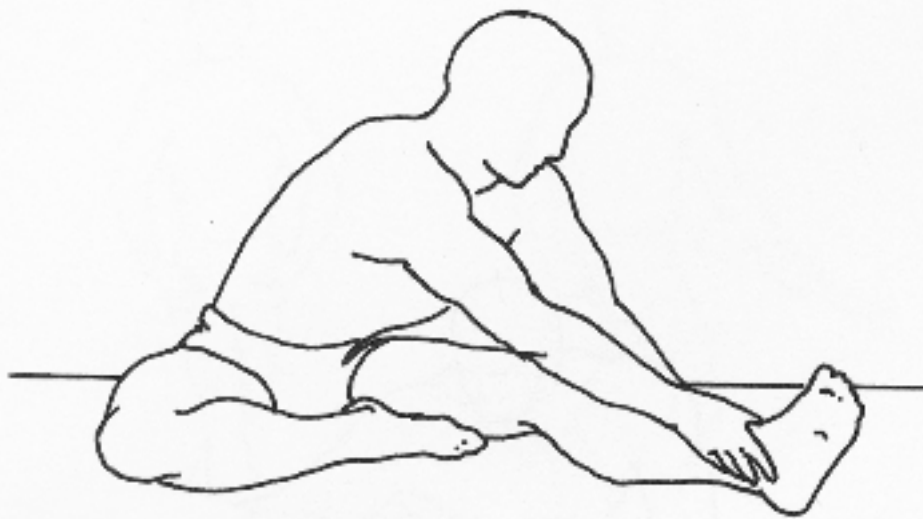




1. Sit upright on the floor with both legs extended.
2. Exhale, keeping both legs straight, extend your upper back, bend forward at the waist, and lower your trunk onto your thighs.
3. Hold the stretch and relax.

Fig. 4

For the second stretch, your starting position is sitting with your legs spread apart. Flex your right knee and slide your foot onto your left thigh. Take your right hand and place it as far as possible toward your left ankle. Bend toward your left foot, pulling your trunk onto your thigh. You should feel tension develop on the right side of your lower back. As soon as you feel tension, stop and hold your position, exhale slowly and count to 20, and then relax. Repeat several times then do the same stretch to the opposite leg. You should spend about five minutes on each side **(Fig. 5)**.



1. Sit upright on the floor with both legs straight.
2. Flex your right knee and slide your heel toward your buttocks.
3. Lower the outer side of your right thigh and calf onto the floor.
4. Place your right heel against the inner side of your left thigh so that a  $90^\circ$  angle is formed between your extended left leg and flexed right leg.
5. Exhale, keeping your left leg straight, bend at the waist, and lower your extended upper torso onto your thigh.
6. Hold the stretch and relax.

Fig. 5

The next goal in overcoming the muscle imbalance of your lower back is to strengthen your abdominal muscles. Your starting position is lying down, face up, with knees bent 90 degrees and feet flat. Place both hands behind your head. Now, try to push your back flat into the floor while pulling your head up toward your knees keeping your head down, chin tucked in. The goal is to feel your shoulder blades clear the floor. Then, SLOWLY return to the starting position, continuing to push your back into the floor while lowering your shoulders. There is no set number of repetitions for this exercise. It is more important to try as hard as possible to flatten your back and keep your chin tucked in with head down as you slowly raise then lower your shoulders. Try spending at least 10 minutes with this exercise and see how many you are able to do. The number of reps will increase as your strength increases (**Fig. 6**).



1. Lie flat on the floor with both knees flexed.
2. Interlock your hands on the back of your head near the crown.
3. Exhale, and pull your head off the floor and onto your chest.
4. Hold the stretch and relax.

Fig. 6

## Final Thoughts

You can't overcome a lifetime of muscle imbalance in a few days. A lot of the 'cures' marketed today are nothing more than temporary relief from the chronic muscle spasms of the lower back associated with facet syndrome. Short term, the best relief for this is heat, weight relief, and a mild anti-inflammatory. Lying down in a hot tub works great! The best over the counter medication in my book is Aleve. Take 2 gel caps in the morning then two more at night. You can safely take up to 1000 mg a day for short periods of time.

Give yourself at least six weeks of daily stretching and exercise. Don't get discouraged. You *will* begin to notice a difference. Then, don't stop. Maintenance is the key to a permanent cure. Good Luck!