

Advanced Comfort with Basic Yoga

Each day, over 15,000 Canadians suffer from lower back pain. Lifting heavy objects incorrectly, sitting still at work or at a computer for long periods, poor posture, or even sleeping in the wrong position can all contribute to lower back pain. Furthermore, psychological stress can have as one of its consequences physical pain, and one of the places this pain tends to manifest is in the back.

There are many ways to treat this pain: medicines, chiropractic and massage therapy, and bed rest being some of them. All of these therapies are valuable, and no alternative remedy is a substitute for proper medical care. However, practicing certain yoga techniques can complement traditional therapy, and can greatly alleviate, or even eliminate, lower back pain.

IMPORTANT: Always consult your physician before practicing yoga if you have lower back pain or a history of back injuries.

The following are three yoga asanas, or postures, which can help in stretching and strengthening the lower back. These postures can be practiced singularly, or as a flowing series.

The Cradle

Lie on your back, with your arms and legs comfortably relaxed. Slowly bring your knees into your chest. Wrap your arms around your legs behind your knees. It is important to wrap the arms behind the knee and not on top, to avoid putting undue pressure on the kneecap. Gently rock back and forth, letting the floor massage your back and spine. Release and repeat.

The Cobra

Begin as in the flying pose, lying face down and relaxed. Bring your arms in and place your palms underneath your shoulders, palms down, elbows bent. Raise the chest, neck, and head off of the floor, supporting yourself with your arms and arching your back. Look up, focusing the eyes upward. Hold 20 - 30 seconds, or for as long as you are able. **ADVANCED VARIATION:** When in the "up" position, slowly raise and extend one arm out in front of you and hold (supporting your weight on your other arm). Repeat with the other arm.

The Cat

Begin on all fours, as if you were going to crawl across the floor. Round the back up and stretch the lower back, as if you were a frightened cat. Keep your abdominal muscles tucked in, and let the head hang down, taking any pressure off the neck. Hold for 20 - 30 seconds.

Practiced alone, or in conjunction with medicine or other therapies, yoga can be a useful means of eliminating lower back pain. Best of all, yoga is a completely natural and **FREE** way of treating back pain, and it benefits your overall physical health in the bargain.

