Royal Osteoporosis Society
Better bone health for everybody

Exercises to care for your back
5

Exercises for back pain after spinal fractures

Who: These exercises may help if:

- you have pain as a result of recent spinal fractures
- you have ongoing pain due to height loss and changes to the shape of your spine.

Why: The pain associated with osteoporosis occurs because of fractures (broken bones). When they occur in the spine they are called spinal or compression fractures. Although these fractures can be painless, for some people they cause severe pain when they first occur. The pain usually gets better as the fracture heals over 6 to 12 weeks. Doing some gentle exercises helps to improve muscle tone, ease tension and reduce muscle spasm in your back.

What you need: An exercise mat and an armless chair. If you want to add some padding under your knees or head for comfort, you'll need something soft like a cushion or pillow too.

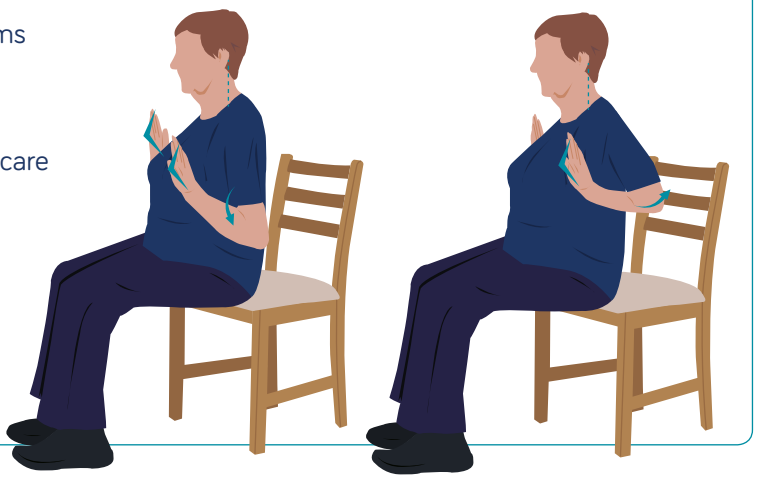
When and how: **Try to do these exercises at least once a day.** Slowly move into the desired positions, as far as your pain allows, using the correct technique. Hold each exercise for 3 – 5 seconds and don't forget to breathe! Relax between each move and take your time. If pain is very severe you may need to alternate rest with gentle movement at first.

These exercises may help to relieve pain any time after fractures occur, so start to introduce them as soon as you feel ready. You don't need to wait until your bones are fully healed. However, if you are having difficulty with them, ask your doctor if you could be referred to a physiotherapist for advice.

1

Shoulder squeeze

- Sit tall on the edge of an armless chair
- Place arms by your sides, elbows bent and palms facing forward
- Bring arms outwards and back, squeezing your shoulder blades back and down together. Take care not to poke your head forward - keep it in line with your spine
- Hold for 3 - 5 seconds, then release to the starting position
- Repeat up to 10 times



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This fact sheet forms part of a range of nine fact sheets on exercise for osteoporosis and bone health. Further resources including general information about osteoporosis and bone health are available at theros.org.uk or call 01761 471771

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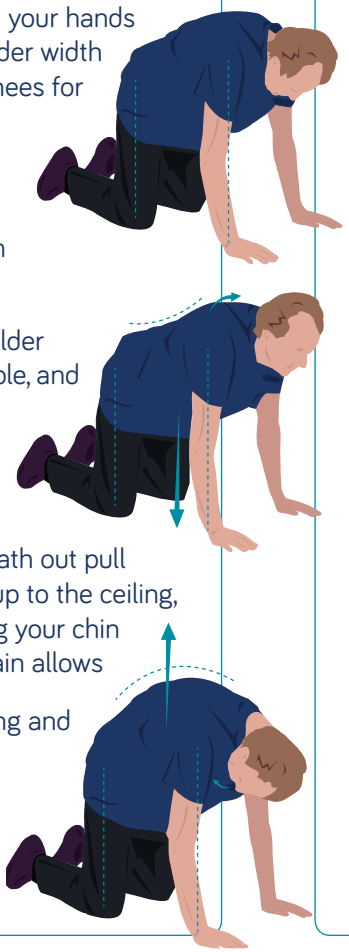
2

Cat

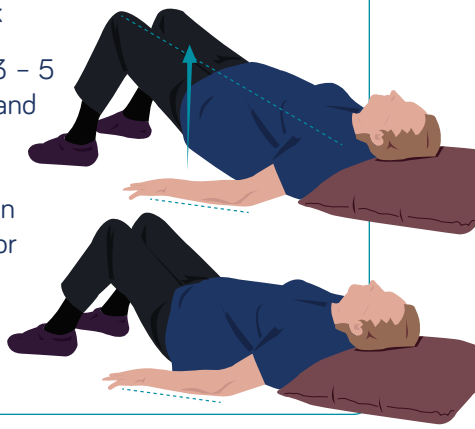
- Position yourself on all fours with your knees directly under your hips, hip width apart and your hands directly under your shoulders, shoulder width apart – use a cushion under your knees for comfort if necessary
- Take a deep breath and as you breathe out slowly arch your back down by lowering your tummy down towards the floor
- Looking forward, squeeze your shoulder blades back and down together if able, and lift your tail bone up
- Hold for 3 - 5 seconds then slowly release, returning to a straight back
- Take another breath and as you breath out pull your tummy in and arch your back up to the ceiling, moving your head down and moving your chin towards your chest as far as your pain allows
- Arch your back up towards the ceiling and squeeze your bottom
- Hold for 3 - 5 seconds then slowly release, returning to a straight back
- Repeat up to 10 times



3

Bridge

- Lie down on your back, knees bent, hip distance apart and feet flat on the floor - use a pillow under your head for comfort if needed
- Keep arms relaxed by your side, palms down
- Lift your bottom up from the floor, towards the ceiling, pushing through your feet and squeeze your bottom
- Keep your shoulders on the floor and your knees close together. Move as far as is comfortable and aim for a straight line between your shoulders and knees - you don't need to arch your back
- Hold for 3 – 5 seconds and gently lower back down to the floor
- Repeat up to 10 times



Well done in completing your exercises to help with back pain after spinal fractures.

Tip: You may be fearful that exercising after a painful spinal fracture could cause further pain or damage - but this isn't the case. Take these exercises at your own pace. Start with a few movements and build up gradually as you become more confident.

The bones in your spine squash down when they fracture but don't go back to their original shape when they heal. If you have long term pain after a fracture this is due to the effect the fracture has had on the surrounding tissues, muscles and ligaments as they try to adapt to the new shape of your spine.

To help relieve this type of pain further you could look to increase the muscle strength in your back using the *Exercises to promote bone and muscle strength* fact sheet (3) theros.org.uk/exercise/Strength and add in exercises to help with posture by following our *Exercises to help with posture* fact sheet (6) theros.org.uk/exercise/Posture. See the accompanying video to these exercises at theros.org.uk/exercise/BackPain

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