Information for Participants

Please call 272-9020 to schedule your appointment for the Back to Fitness Program

Clinic telephone: 272-9020

Information about Exercise Class for Participants

The Back to Fitness exercise class is designed to help you to manage your own back. The class should be considered a stepping-stone to help you get back to normal activities and to prevent back pain recurrences. It is set up and run by physical therapists who have special interest in back pain. This back exercise class has been studied scientifically.

The classes start and end with gentle warming exercises and stretching. You work at your own pace at individual exercises for one minute. Initially you should focus on performing the exercise with correct technique. Then you will be encouraged to count the number of times you can repeat an exercise in one minute so you can improve on that number. Once you are able to increase your repetitions with good technique, you should progress to the next level of that exercise. Each exercise has two or three levels of difficulty. Do not try to compete with other members of the class as people vary greatly in fitness levels.

The exercises will start gently. Taking up an activity you are not used to may at first cause some muscular aches (as any sports person knows). This is normal and should not last long.

The classes aim to strengthen and stretch all your main muscle groups including the abdominals, back extensors, quadriceps and glutei. They also help to improve posture, increase activity, improve fitness and, above all, increase confidence in the use of your spine.

Meeting times and Guidelines

Classes will meet every Monday and Wednesday morning from 8 to 9 o’clock. Your attendance in class as scheduled is a necessity because there is often a waiting list. If you must miss a class, please tell us in advance. You will only be scheduled for 8 treatment visits. If you cancel for a class, the cancelled class will not be rescheduled. If you miss class two time without prior notification, you will be dropped from the program to make room for people on the waiting list.
Regular physical activity and stretching are an important part of recovering from back pain. When you start to do exercises you are not used to, you may get some aches and pains in the muscles. This is normal and should get easier as you get used to them. It is important to pace yourself. You should start off at a level that you can easily manage, taking it at your own pace of comfort. Although at first you may find the exercises difficult, they will get easier as you carry on, and you will enjoy them more. You should not compete with anyone else as everyone has a different level of fitness. You should aim gradually to increase the rate at which you do your exercises. You can apply this to other activities, such as walking, swimming, gardening and household chores as well as sports activities.

Often we try to do as much as possible on a good day and find the pain is bad the next day. Then we need to rest and cannot do anything. This can cause us to avoid more and more activities, because they seem to make us worse. Instead the aim should be to gradually step up your level of activity every week over a period of time.

The physical therapist will help you select the appropriate level for starting each exercise. Most of the exercises have three grades – easy, medium and difficult. First, focus on achieving the correct technique. When you have completed each exercise, write down how many times you repeated it in one minute. When an exercise seems quite easy, try to perform more repetitions or try the next level of difficulty.

The physical therapist will help and encourage you in class. At home you will need to find ways of rewarding yourself when you have stuck to your plan. Ask you family and friends to help with this.

Today, write down an activity you would like to be able to do. Then plan to carry it out regularly, and each week you will be able to improve bit by bit.
University Hospital Outpatient Rehabilitation
Back to Fitness Program

Criteria for admittance:

1. Red flag clearance.
2. Chronic State
3. Non-specific
4. Patient commitment
University Hospital Outpatient Rehabilitation
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Order of the class:

Warm up ~10 minutes
Participants may choose a form of cardiovascular exercise for warm-up: stationary cycling, walking or even stairmaster. Walking can be varied for interest and to warm up different muscle groups: walk on toes, walk on heels, walk with high knees, large steps, touching heels to bottom, walk sideways, walk backwards.

Stretching ~7 minutes
Hold for 30 seconds no bouncing
- Hamstrings
- Calf
- Double knee to chest
- Prone press-up
- Side lying quads
- Piriformis
- Shoulder

Individual Exercises ~20 minutes
- See flow sheet

Stretching ~7 minutes
Hold for 30 seconds no bouncing
- Hamstrings
- Calf
- Double knee to chest
- Prone press-up
- Side lying quads
- Piriformis
- Shoulder

Tip of the day ~5 minutes

Relaxation ~10 minutes
A. Lie on your back with your legs uncrossed, arms at your side.
B. Focus on your breathing. Breath in through your nose, allowing your stomach to rise. As you exhale, your stomach should fall. After several deep breaths you should start to feel comfortable and relaxed.
C. Now draw attention to relaxing your toes, remaining aware of your breathing. Focus on your toes for a minute or two, then slowly move up the body giving each area the attention it needs.
D. Pay particular attention to any area that has more discomfort then others and focus on deeper relaxation in that area, while maintaining awareness of your breathing.
E. These relaxation techniques should lead you to a feeling of heaviness and warmth throughout the entire limb and eventually throughout the entire body.
Tip of the Day

Tip One
*Walk:* This is one of the best forms of exercises. It mobilizes and lubricates most joints of the body. Start a routine of walking at least 15-30 minutes a day for most days of the week. Not only does walking have great cardiovascular benefit, it can also elevate your mood and make you feel better physically.

Swimming is another great form of exercise for the whole body, but it does not give the weight bearing benefits of walking. Swimming is good for a change from walking.

Tip Two
*Keep up regular exercise:* Once you have decided what exercises to do, how much to do, and when to do them, make a commitment to a regular schedule. If you take a break from this schedule (for instance, if you are sick or on vacation), get back to it as soon as possible. You might have to start off at lower level then where you left off.

Tip Three
*Walk Tall:* Imagine that you have a string attached to the top of your head pulling you up to the sky. Tighten your lower abdomen or “corset” muscle by pulling your bellybutton to your spine. Now tighten the muscles of the pelvic floor. Keep a slight curve in your lower back. Think of this as your baseline position. You can move into other positions as comfort demands, but always return to this position, especially for performing exercises or other strenuous activity.

Tip Four
*Maintain Neutral Spine:* The lumbar spine has a natural arch to it. This arch, much like a Roman aqueduct, helps to support the weight of the body. If the arch becomes too straight or too curved, it loses its neutral position and can contribute to back discomfort. The rectus abdominus muscle travels from your pubic bone to your lower ribs. When activated, it pulls the pubic bone forward, which causes the low back to flatten. When you tighten the muscles in your low back, the opposite motion occurs: the arch in the low back becomes exaggerated. To find your neutral spine position, use your rectus abdominus and low back muscles together to maintain a slight arch in the low back. Keep this neutral position while doing the exercises in class and during your daily activities.
Tip Five
*Lift, Reach, Push and Dig*: These basic movements are involved in most of our daily activities and exercises. Efficient body mechanics are important for performing these movements in a pain free manner. Consider alternatives for your daily tasks if you feel you are not yet fit enough to do them.

Plan how you will accomplish a challenging task. When working with a larger load, keep it as close to the body as possible. If needed, break up the job so you are not working with the same heavy load for an extended period time. Remember to maintain good posture. If you need a break, go for a short walk and do stretching instead of slumping into a chair.

Tip Six
*Maintain Fitness*: While you are enrolled in the Back to Fitness program, start doing the same exercise routine one additional day during the week. When the program ends, keep doing the exercises Monday and Wednesday on your own, as well as the additional day that you have chosen. Back to Fitness should be a stepping-stone to help you make physical fitness part of your lifestyle. In order to prevent back pain or deal with recurrences (which are very common), maintain an exercise regimen for the rest of your life. You can skip days every now and then, but let that be the exception and not the rule.

As your back becomes healthier, you may modify or completely change the exercises you have learned in the Back to Fitness program. What is most important is that you find a form of exercise that you enjoy. This will help make exercise a regular habit in your life. Keep your mind open to all of the health club, community center and senior center options available in Albuquerque.

Tip Seven
*Prevention*: Just like changing the oil in your car or brushing your teeth, the human body needs regular maintenance to stay in good working order. Exercise, good nutrition and proper rest are the tools for keeping your body in good working order.

Discuss your new exercise program with your family and friends to help you keep your commitment. You might attract others to join you in your lifestyle change.

Tip Eight
*Stress and Tension*: Consider the connection between mind and body. Be aware that stress and feeling down may increase your pain. Relaxation techniques and breathing exercises can reduce muscular tension to give you control over your back pain. Do not give up everything you enjoy because of your back. You may need to participate in hobbies, sports and other daily activities at a reduced level, but you should stay involved even if you experience minor to moderate pain.