

# 8 EASY EXERCISES TO EASE LOW BACK PAIN

- A BEGINNING TO THE END OF YOUR DISCOMFORT -



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**the BEHAN PROTOCOL**

FOR BETTER BACK AND SPINE HEALTH



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HELLO!

I'M Corinne Behan..... A PILATES AND YOGA INSTRUCTOR, BREATHING COACH AND CREATOR OF THE BEHAN PROTOCOL FOR BETTER BACK AND SPINE HEALTH.

Pilates is often recommended to reduce the instances of back pain because it strengthens the core, a group of muscles that act as our bodies natural girdle supporting the back much like the weightlifting belts used by powerlifters. Pilates also mobilizes the hips and strengthens the glutes further helping to stabilize and support the lower back. Pilates teaches us how to stand, sit and move with core engagement in mind and can help us replace less desirable postural habits with healthier ones.

Here you will find 8 simple, but not easy exercises that can start you on the way to banishing back pain if you include them into your workout routine regularly....

Work up to 10 repetitions of each exercise, moving slowly and mindfully to get the most out of each one.

# 1. Pelvic Tilt (Imprinting)

Imprinting is used to mobilize the vertebrae of the spine. To begin, lay on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Maintain a natural curve in your back (neutral spine). As you exhale, brace the abdominal muscles and imagine dropping the vertebrae one at a time into the mat without tucking the pelvis. Feel the vertebrae behind the ribs, sternum, and neck “imprinting” on to the mat beneath you. Inhale and feel the muscles of the spine relax and return to their original shape.



## 2. Modified Dead Bug

Begin on your back with knees bent, feet off the floor in the “table top” position and arms extended straight up to the ceiling, in line with the shoulders (Modified Dead Bug” position). On the inhale, extend the right arm back towards the wall behind you while simultaneously extending the left leg long, keeping the foot off the floor. Exhale to return to the starting position. Inhale and extend the opposite arm and leg. Take care to keep the abdominal muscles engaged (imagine a girdle around the core) so you can engage the abdominal.



### 3. Bridge

**Weak hamstrings and gluteal muscles are often a culprit of lower back pain.**

**Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat and hip-distance apart with arms long by your sides. Inhale to prepare and exhale as you begin to lift the hips off the mat. Continue to lift one vertebra at a time, until the hips, knees, and shoulders are in a line. Press the back of the arms and the heels of the feet into the floor as you do this. Pause at the top. On an exhale, articulate your spine back towards the floor: upper back, mid-back, lower-back and ending with your pelvis on the mat and the spine in a neutral position (maintaining the natural curves of the neck and lower back).**



## 4. Toe Taps

Begin on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor, arms by your sides. Lift your feet off the floor so your legs are in a “table top” position (knees above hips at a 90-degree angle). Keeping your chest open, shoulders back and down and back flat on the mat, inhale to prepare. Slowly lower one foot towards the floor as far as you can without your spine changing shape. For some, the toes may touch the floor or hover. Exhale, and return the knee to the starting position in line with the hips. Inhale and slowly lower the other foot towards the floor. Exhale and return to the starting position.



## 5. Modified Swan

Spinal extensions like the modified Swan exercise strengthen the muscles that run along the spine, helping to prevent back pain. Lie on your stomach with your elbows bent and hands pressed into the mat by your sides, your legs hip-width apart and your forehead resting gently on the mat. On an exhale, gently press the pubic bone and hands down into the mat as you lift the upper body up, finding length through the lower back. Reach out through the crown of your head as you create length from the crown of head to the tailbone. Think of finding length in the spine rather than lifting up as high as you can with your upper body, as this will just put undue pressure on the lower back. Inhale and lengthen the entire spine as you lower your torso and head back down.



## 6. Bird Dog

This is a true full-body exercise. In addition to challenging balance, it works the entire core, including the glutes, hamstrings, and back muscles. Begin in a quadruped position, with wrists under the shoulders and knees under the hips. Inhale to prepare. Exhale, extend one arm straight out in front of you in line with your shoulder and only as high as your shoulder and extend the opposite leg behind you, in line with the corresponding hip and only to hip-height. Create a long line from the fingers of your extended arm to the toes of your extended leg. Pull the front ribs towards the back ribs and draw the navel to the spine, as if someone is tightening the strings of a corset around your mid-section. Inhale, hold the position for a moment and then exhale, return to the original quadruped position. Repeat with the other arm and leg.



## 7. Side Lying Hip Work (Clam)

Strengthening the muscles that lift the leg away from the midline of the body (hip abductors) helps to stabilize the pelvis when walking and performing the tasks of daily life.

Lie on your side with your head resting on your outstretched bottom arm, or on a pillow if it's more comfortable for your neck. The top arm can be bent with your hand on the floor in front of you to provide stability. Bend your knees to a 90-degree angle so that your knees are in front of your hips. Keeping your hips and shoulders stacked, lift your top knee to form a diamond shape while keeping the feet together. Try not to turn through the rib cage, rock or tip the pelvis as you open and close your knee.



## 8. Figure Four Stretch

Tights hips and glutes often contribute to back pain. The Figure Four Stretch is an effective way to open up those areas. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Keeping the knees bent, lift one foot off the floor and rest the ankle on the thigh of the supporting leg, forming a “Figure Four” with the legs. Clasp your hands behind the back of the thigh of the supporting leg or, to increase the intensity of the stretch, grasp the shin of the top leg. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds. Lower the leg, release the hands and repeat with the other side in the “Figure Four” position.





**You will feel better in ten sessions, look better in twenty sessions, and have a completely new body in thirty sessions."** *JOSEPH PILATES*



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IN SHOWING  
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SOME MORE  
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