

Exercises for your thoracic spine

Pain in your thoracic spine

Pain in the *thoracic* (upper) area of the back is common in people who sit bent forwards for long periods, especially students and typists, and those who lift constantly (such as nursing mothers). The symptoms include pain between the shoulder blades (typically) and possibly difficulty in taking a deep breath. Sometimes the pain can be felt in the front of the chest.



Examples of pain distribution in the thoracic area

There appear to be two main causes:

1. chronic strain of the ligaments binding the vertebrae together due to poor posture
2. stiff or 'jammed' joints where the ribs join the spine—usually due to injury, including lifting and falls

How can it be prevented?

Maintain a good posture by doing the following:

- Keep your head erect.
- Brace your shoulder blades together and then release—practise many times a day.
- Look after your posture at the office; have a good chair with a firm back support.

Exercises

Select at least 2 exercises that suit you and perform them once or twice a day for about 5 minutes.

Exercise 1: Shoulder brace

Brace the shoulder blades as you sit or stand, by swinging your clasped hands behind your back, extending your head back at the same time.



Exercise 2: Back arch

Lie face downwards. Lift your shoulders, hold for 10 seconds, then relax.



Exercise 3: 'Seal' movement

Lie face downwards. Lift from the waist, and rotate your upper trunk from side to side so that you feel a tight stretch in your back.



Exercise 4: Broom-handle stretch and swing

Place a long rod, such as a broom handle, behind your neck, grasp it as shown and rotate your body from side to side, reaching maximum stretch.



Exercise 5: Knees-to-elbows back arch

Position your back like a cat, as illustrated (a). Support yourself on both knees and elbows. If you need to exercise the upper part of the spine, place your elbows forward and lower your chest (b). For the lower part of the back, perform the exercise on your hands and knees. Hunch your back as you breathe in, and then arch it as you fully breathe out.

