



Tips for Dealing with Low Back Pain in Runners

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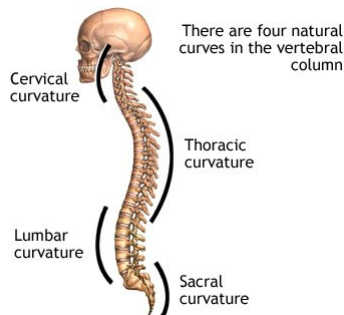
As many as 14% of American runners experience low back pain each year. So, on any given Saturday morning run, there are probably 100s of us that might have complaints of low back pain during the training season. I honestly hope that you are never one of those, but just in case, let's arm you with some information should low back aches or pains arise during your training!

To be clear, treating low back pain is not the same for every person. Low back pain can stem from muscle asymmetries, low back mobility problems, strength deficits, nerve irritation, or structural changes in the spine. For the sake of brevity, here are some red flags to be aware of. If you ever have any of these, seek a medical consult, and then highlight some great ways that you can maintain a healthy back while running or walking.

RED FLAGS to be aware of include: Bowel or bladder dysfunction, unrelenting pain in any position, numbness and tingling below the knee, unexpected weight loss, acute pain lasting longer than 6 weeks. These are all reasons to immediately see your physician.

If you don't have any of these red flags, let's move on to and talk about great ways to maintain a healthy back as a runner.

There are four normal curves in the spine. They are displayed below. A goal for you is to maintain these normal curves in your daily activities, especially when running or during any other physical activity. Often the strain put on your spine is not from running as much as the strain which accumulates with your daily activities. For example, sitting at a desk in a slouched posture, 40 hours per week can reduce the lumbar curvature and increase a forward head position and curvature in the upper back (thoracic curvature of your back). Just the strain on the spine from this repetitive poor posture can create pain. If this sounds like you, consider how you can protect your spine simply with improved posture and workplace ergonomics.



Like almost every joint in the body, the spine benefits from maintaining a balanced combination of mobility and strength.

MOBILITY: A healthy spine should have full mobility in several directions (rotation, side bending, bending forward and backwards). Since running is generally in a forward motion, the primary motions to check are flexion and extension. Do you have enough lumbar motion to attain a full yoga cobra pose, as pictured, and to pull both knees to chest, as demonstrated, without pain? If you don't, it may be worth working on this if it's not painful.



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STRENGTH: The strength needed to support the spine with running comes from the deep muscles of the abdominals, lumbar spine, and hips. These are the primary muscles we call the “core”. When these muscles are strong, the chances of injury are reduced. There are several ways to strengthen, but some basic examples, included here, are planks, side planks, and bridges. Have someone check your form and be sure your navel is drawing in toward your spine (but keep breathing!). A stable core provides your legs a better base from which to propel your body forward.



As always, if you have questions, call us, or just come see us at any of the Advanced Rehabilitation locations in the Tampa Bay Area. We will keep you moving – no matter what you do.

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