

# Yoga for Prevention of Low Back Pain

## Learning Objectives

### Course Excerpt

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to

- ✓ test for the following muscular imbalances: tight back extensors, weak abdominals, tight primary hip flexor (iliopsoas), tight secondary hip flexors (rectus femoris and tensor fasciae latae), weak hip extensors (gluteus maximus and hamstrings), tight hamstrings, and weak primary hip flexor (iliopsoas).
- ✓ teach students how to strengthen the multifidus muscle using two yoga poses (the Easy Sunbird pose and the Modified Prone Boat pose).
- ✓ use basic safety cues for the following categories of yoga poses: forward folds, back bends, lateral folds, twists.
- ✓ modify ten yoga poses [Seated forward fold, Pigeon, Triangle, Down dog, Child's pose, Tree, Bridge, Cobra, Seated lateral fold, Seated spinal twist] to make them gentler and easier by either (1) reducing the intensity, or (2) using a prop (folded blanket, wall, strap, block, etc).
- ✓ identify which yoga poses are stereotypically contraindicated for persons with low back pain.
- ✓ demonstrate and teach the three fundamental therapeutic-yoga poses (Cat-Cow movement, Cobra pose, Supine Knee to Chest pose).
- ✓ demonstrate and teach the four classic resting poses (Child's pose, Crocodile pose, Hug the Knees pose, and Savasana).
- ✓ format a 60 minute gentle yoga class for prevention of low back pain. This includes selection and sequencing of 12 – 16 appropriate yoga poses, as well as inserting appropriate resting poses.
- ✓ format a 60 minute gentle yoga class for a specific condition – either scoliosis, osteoporosis, sciatica, or arthritis. This includes selection and sequencing of 12 – 16 appropriate yoga poses, as well as inserting appropriate resting poses.

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## Yoga for prevention of Low Back Pain

Low back pain can bring even the most productive, pragmatic, and positive people to their knees. Persisting or reoccurring low back pain eventually causes people to feel that they can no longer depend on their bodies. Movement becomes a chore instead of a joy, and life becomes a never ending search for relief.

If you are one of the lucky few who have never suffered from low back pain, congratulations! However, if you or someone within your circle of loved ones has had to deal with low back pain, you are probably aware of the serious nature of these sufferers' plight as they search for relief from symptoms that often have no identifiable cause. Living with low back pain is stressful, exhausting and frustrating, and it diminishes the quality of life.

“My doctor has put me through all kinds of tests to identify the source of my low back pain, but he found nothing wrong with me. He suggested that I might benefit from practicing yoga. I am wondering how or why yoga would help alleviate my back pain.”

To answer this client's question, the first thing we need to do is take a look at some of the features and causes of low back pain that has no identifiable structural cause. Later we'll examine the type of yoga that would be appropriate for managing low back pain.

### I. What causes Low Back Pain?

#### ❖ Non specific backache

Researchers estimate that up to 80% of adults will eventually suffer from some sort of low back pain [1]. They have also concluded that most cases of low back pain cannot be traced to a specific structural defect. Furthermore, the MRIs of many people who have never complained of low back pain revealed bulging disc and other spinal abnormalities [2]. These findings seem quite perplexing, but they represent the norm regarding the phenomenon of low back pain. This is why the cause and cure for most cases of low back pain remains an enigma.

Structural misalignments caused by muscular imbalance or by fascia that has become improperly positioned due to irregular function accounts for as much as 90% of low back pain [3]. In this case, the pain is caused by a malfunction in the

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soft tissues – the muscles, ligaments, or fascia. This is the type of pain for which no true structural cause can be located and no specific medical diagnosis made. Muscle spasms, sprains, strains, SI joint pain, and low back pain caused by non-neurological conditions all fall into the category

of ‘non specific backache’ [4]. This type of pain tends to occur at the joints, or points of connection and intersection in the body. In the case of low back pain, the primary joints involved include the spinal vertebra, the SI (sacroiliac) joint, and the hips.

#### ❖ Patterns of resignation

Certain postural anomalies in which the body’s structure has wandered far enough from its natural, normal anatomical placement will result in mild or moderate back pain. The term ‘patterns of resignation’ clearly expresses the true nature of these mal-adaptations. Patterns of resignation are body indicators of trauma, submission, and lack of freedom. These patterns are characteristic behaviors, postures, and mannerisms that indicate the underlying emotions of fear, guilt, anger, or sorrow. These patterns imply that something in one’s body and one’s psyche has been relinquished or diminished.

Patterns of resignation began as a natural bodily response to either physical or mental stressors. As a form of protection, the body automatically makes certain innate adaptations such as tightness in the belly, tightness in the buttocks, tightness and compression in the lower back, pinched toes, a clenched jaw, a compressed or frozen ribcage, inhibited or restricted respiration, a locked shoulder, a collapsed chest, and hunched shoulders. The list goes on and on. Designed as a form of immediate, momentary, or short term protection from external threats, these patterns should be released when they are no longer needed. They are not meant to be permanent adaptations.

However, we live in a fast and frantic world. Every day we are exposed to a stressful, hectic, and sometimes toxic environment that is filled with elements of competition and aggression. The physical and psychological pressures within this type of environment serve to over-activate the body’s stress response. As our characteristic adaptations to stressors are continually activated, repeated, and rehearsed, they become habitual. This is how patterns of resignation are born. In an unresolved state, patterns of resignation result in habitual tension and habitual misalignment, and will eventually lead to chronic pain.

#### ❖ Overweight

If you are overweight, you probably carry too much excess baggage in the front side of your body. The extra weight creates a burden for your back, and it is

a potential source of pain and stress for the joints. Overweight can cause the extensor muscles in the back to work too hard. These muscles can become too tight, overworked, and develop the tendency to spasm. This promotes an imbalance among the bodies' flexors and extensors, which negatively affects posture. Being overweight also puts additional strain on the feet, knees, and hips. In some instances, the 'cushioning' or extra 'padding' of being overweight limits the possibility of attaining normal range of motion at the joints. As ROM suffers, movement becomes impaired. Limited movement leads to a de-conditioned body – which often results in low back pain.