

# Machine-Free Exercises to Improve Back Muscles

Back pain affects a lot of us. Many exercise programs focus on thin legs and a solid core, but we could all use a stronger back. We're less likely to sustain injuries while performing sports, but also while performing daily chores such as lifting grocery bags or worse, sitting for hours at a time. Good spine posture is important, and incorporating back strengthening exercises into your routine is a great way to help your body be stronger overall. Read on for some machine-free exercises that are easy to learn, and will get you pumped for strength!

## Bent-over Reverse Fly

You can benefit from doing this exercise without weights, but if you can handle it, I recommend holding on to at least 5 pound dumbbells for this. With weights in hands (or not), stand with your feet shoulder distance apart and knees bent slightly. Keep your back straight as you bend slightly forward. Your chest should be over your knees. As you exhale, lift both arms up to the side, elbows slightly bent, as you squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for just a moment, then slowly, with control, lower the weights/your hands back down to in front of your knees. Bring your arms back up, for a total of 5 reps, then set the weights back down on the ground.

Turning up the intensity of this exercise is easy: either increase the weights you use, increase the number of reps you do before you break, or you can bend further forward in your initial stance. Be sure to keep your head level with your spine. If it feels painful, decrease the weight you are pulling up.

## Superman

Lie belly down with your arms extended above your head, palms

down, and your toes tips resting on the floor. Start by resting your forehead on the ground and take a deep breath in. As you exhale, while keeping your core engaged and your arm and leg muscles strong, lift your arms and legs up off the ground 4-6 inches. Hold this pose tightly for a few seconds, and then inhale slowly as you lower your arms and legs back down.

You can make this more difficult by bringing your limbs higher up, and holding for longer periods. Variations can make it a fun exercise as well, such as lifting alternate hands and legs (right arm and left leg up at the same time). Even though one leg or arm is down, keep those muscles engaged. And be sure to keep your shoulders down and away from your ears. Your gaze can stay on the floor, don't lift your head up.

## **Bridge**

The bridge can be done full, or as a half bridge, and both will help strengthen your lower back muscles. The main muscle used for the bridge is the gluteus maximus, which you might think is only good for making your bum look good, but really it is the foundation of your back, so keep it strong. For half-bridge, start by laying on the ground, knees bent, with your feet flat on the ground, about hip width apart. With your arms at your side, lift your hips up to the ceiling as you push on the floor with your feet. Keep a straight line from your chest to your knees as you breathe deeply for a few breaths in this pose. Lower your back slowly to the floor, take a few breaths in and repeat. Do this 15-20 times.

When you are strong enough, you can do full bridge. For this, start with your feet in the same place, but instead of keeping your arms at your sides, place your hands palm down next to your ears – your wrists facing away from your body, and your fingers just under your shoulders. Start by pushing up on your hips, and once they are up, use your arms to put the top half of your body up to meet your hips. Keep in this pose for as

many breaths as you can – start with 5 and work up to 10. Come down slowly, ensuring that your head comes up to keep your spine long. Try to roll down the spine, one vertebrae at a time. Do the full bridge 3 times then when you are done, bring your knees into your chest and squeeze to release the tension from the pose.

Incorporating these poses into your home workout will strengthen your back muscles, which in turn makes your core even tighter. Just takes a few extra minutes in your daily exercise routine. Add these exercises ... your back will thank you.

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## **Burpee See Burpee Do**

Your quick challenge is to do at least 50 burpees in 10 minutes. Take as many as 30 seconds rest per 1 minute round, which makes this challenge totally doable. Record in a journal each day how many burpees you can pull off and challenge yourself to do 1 or 2 more per day than the day before, and watch numbers quickly add up! If you are getting started, aim for 25 in 10 minutes and work up to 60, 70, even 90 burpees in a 10 minute stretch.

Doing burpees, or any exercise, consistently, you will find that your core will get stronger and if you want a further challenge you can add an additional squat round while holding arms at shoulder level for 50 squats, keep a wide stance and be sure to squeeze your glutes while standing. Always remember that your knees should never go past your toes during the squat. If you can't squat low without letting your knees project past the toes, then don't go so far down. Stay strong and build the muscles, and always squeeze the glutes at the top of each rep.



If you can spend only 15 minutes every other day doing these two exercises, you will find a long term change in both your body and your mind. Give those minutes to yourself as often as you can!