

A Personalized Guide From:



YOUR PERSONALIZED
BACK PAIN
PHASE ASSESMENT



EL PASO
PHYSICAL THERAPY

YOU ARE HERE

PHASE: 1



Phase 1



get your back
pain under
control

Phase 2



fix the muscle
imbalance

Phase 3



mobility &
strength

Phase 4



maintenance

PHASE 1:

GET YOUR BACK PAIN UNDER CONTROL






Phase 1: Get Your Back Pain Under Control		
DAY PAIN	4-7 days per week	
NIGHT PAIN	4-7 days per week	
TIME ON FEET	0-10 minutes	
GLUTES/ABS	Cannot flex/tighten glute and/or abdominal muscles	
MOBILITY	Consistent pain bending or twisting in 2+ directions	
	What it's like today	Next level to reach
ACTIVITIES	Can't do anything because my back hurts more when I move.	Being able to tolerate 20-30 minutes of walking without stopping because of pain.
X-RAY / MRI	Might look normal. Could look like everything is wrong...and anywhere in between.	It will probably look the same as before.
RE: SURGERY	You might need spine surgery if medications and injections haven't helped.	Delaying spine surgery by 1-2 years
I SAY THIS OUTLOUD	<i>"My back is getting worse." "I'm desperate for pain relief." "I was up all night in pain." "I'm missing out on things I want to do." "I feel old."</i>	<i>"It's getting better, but I still feel it." "It's not as bad as it was before." "I've been much worse than this!" "I can handle this back pain, just let me rest a few minutes."</i>
BACK FEELS LIKE	Stiff and painful. Even resting is uncomfortable.	Less painful and stiff. It's possible to get comfortable. Walking more would be nice though.
MAIN CONCERNING THOUGHT	<i>"I'm probably going to need back surgery."</i>	<i>"I don't think I need surgery at this time. I'm hopeful to get my back feeling great again."</i>
HOW IT AFFECTS LIFE	Desperately looking for pain relief. Purchasing medications, devices, supplements. Seeking pain injections. Holds onto furniture, walls, and other people while walking.	Open to taking pain medications, devices and using braces...but no longer relying on them. At times uses hands to hold on to walls and furniture while walking
Bottom Line	The back is a problem just about every day.	Get better by not doing anything that irritates the back

1 START HERE WATCH THIS FIRST



This video explains the entire process covered in the **Back Pain Recovery Program**.

**GOT IT?
LET'S SEE
YOUR CURRENT PHASE!**

-  The methodology
-  The differences between phases
-  Problems to be aware of at each phase
-  How to move through each phase quickly and safely
-  8 separate tracks each covering specific back problems

1 YOUR PHASE

Phase 1 Overview



This video provides an overview of what goals & activities to focus on in Phase 1

**Day Pain 4-7
days/wk**

**Night Pain 4-7
days/wk**

**Time On Feet
0-10 Minutes**

**Abdominals &
Glutes Can't
Flex**

**Back Pain
When Moving
In 2 Or More
Directions**



WHEN YOU'RE IN PHASE 1

This is the toughest phase to be in. Your back problem is something you think about nearly every day. Desperation sets in for many people here. Even though you don't want to take pain medication, you might end up trying it in hopes of getting some relief from the pain.

The annoying and near-daily back symptoms here in Phase 1 are what drive people to visit the doctor to figure out what's going on and maybe get something from them for the pain relief. They'll always want to get an X-ray or MRI of your back, as it's the standard for the situation.

If this is the first visit with the doctor, they'll point out the signs on the X-ray that make them think you've got serious back problems. And if it's not too bad, they'll offer you prescription pain medications, tell you to rest for a while, start walking for exercise, and possibly tell you to lose weight.

If it's not the first time you're seeing a doctor for your back, then they'll be comparing your new X-rays / MRI to your old X-rays / MRI to point out where your back has become worse. They might offer a pain injection if you're looking for something stronger than the medications you've already taken. And if the X-ray / MRI shows that your back has worsened, then the doctors love to rattle off big scary words like arthritis, stenosis, and degenerative disc disease to make you feel especially bad.

Then the doctor will start blaming the back problem on things you have no control over. Things like your age, your past injuries, your work history, and your genetics. It's the kind of medical conversation that happens over the years as you continue to follow up with the doctor and your back gets gradually worse. Until one day, the doctor says the dreaded words no one wants to hear, "You're going to need spine surgery."



1

THE BIG CHALLENGE:

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S FLARING UP YOUR BACK



The biggest problem in Phase 1 is identifying the handful of things you're doing that are aggravating your back. These are the things you can control.

Often, it's that you may be forcing yourself through painful exercises like walking, using a bicycle, or even exercises given to you by a healthcare professional who ISN'T trained to help you avoid surgery because they specialize in helping people during or after surgery.

Another common problem is that people don't off-load their back enough. Using a cane, crutch, or walker can immediately reduce pain simply because you're not putting your full body weight through the your back. It's rare that healthcare professionals recommend people try this out. In fact, they usually tell people to start walking for exercise, never even bringing up off-loading. This leads to gradually worse back pain.

After those 2 big problems, there might be a combination of doing very light exercises to loosen the back joints, massaging certain stiff muscles, and temporarily changing other habits or routines to get the back to calm down so you can successfully move into Phase 2.

{It's possible that even before anything else, you've got to believe that your back problem CAN improve despite your age, past injuries, work history, and genetics. There's conflicting information from the healthcare industry that frequently confuses people. This is because there's no conclusive medical research evidence backing for mainstream treatments. One year we hear about research supporting a certain treatment, then the next year research comes out telling us that same treatment is bad for you. Expert opinion is what we currently rely on. This means you've got to try different treatments and see what truly works for you.}

TREATMENTS TO FOCUS ON

IN PHASE 1

Focus on using the following treatments in Phase 1.

These are listed in order of priority based on effectiveness and safety.

1

Mechanical Pain Relief (Most important to focus on using)

- Offloading using a cane, crutch, or walker so that you can begin to get around for basic life activities without aggravating the back.
- Massage for the stiff back, hip, and thigh muscles that cause the pressure to build up in the spine. This can provide a lot of relief, although it's only temporary, but it's without using medications!
- Ice / heat can help mitigate the back pain temporarily so that you can get better rest.

2

Pain Control Exercises (Proceed into these as you feel you can without worse symptoms)

- Rocking forward and backward from hands and feet to get stuck spine joints moving again.
- Knees to chest stretching to maintain and even gain motion in the spine.
- Abdominal activation exercises to begin to wake up the lower abdominal muscles in preparation for correcting the major muscle imbalance.

3

Chemical Pain Relief (Consult with your doctor about using these, and look to use these only if the above treatments are not helping.)

- Strategic use of over-the-counter pain medications without relying on them.
- Pain injections can be helpful to get more rest. Careful not to do more activity assuming the problem is gone because the pain and swelling get better. Use this to help you get to doing the exercises to fix the muscle imbalance.
- Other injections like stem cells, hyaluronic acid, and platelet-rich-plasma to help with healing, possibly pain relief, and making new cartilage cells...but they do nothing for the muscle imbalance and so their effectiveness will only be short-term.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE IN PHASE 1

Work on treatments from Phase 1 until you improve enough to move into Phase 2 and begin the next treatments.



Your goal is to go from having these symptom criteria:

- Day Pain 4-7 days/wk
- Night Pain 4-7 days/wk
- Time On Feet 0-10 Minutes
- Abs & Glutes Can't Flex
- Pain bending/twisting in 2+ directions

To having these symptom criteria:

- Day pain 1-3 days or less
- Night Pain 1-3 days or less
- Tolerating being on your feet standing and walking combined for 10-30 minutes
- Being able to consciously flex ab & glute muscles (even if other muscles also flex too)
- Pain bending/twisting in 1 direction

***You cannot move out of Phase 1 until ALL goals have been reached or surpassed.**

****Another way of saying this is, you cannot stop doing Phase 1 treatments until you no longer have any of the symptom criteria from Phase 1.**

*****Don't move onto Phase 2 unless you meet ALL the symptom criteria for Phase 2**

THE BOTTOM LINE

PHASE 1 IS ABOUT GOING FROM HAVING PAIN, SWELLING, AND NOT BEING ABLE TO DO NORMAL THINGS JUST ABOUT EVERY DAY...

...TO ONLY HAVE THIS BOTHER YOU A DAY OR 2 EACH WEEK AND ALLOW YOU TO GET BACK TO DOING SOME OF YOUR NORMAL, EVERYDAY THINGS.



**Less Pain
During The Day**



Better Sleep



**More Time On
Feet**



**More spinal
motion**

This is when you feel like you're finally making improvements and not just getting worse every week. This puts you in a position to exercise without flaring up again.

WHY IT'S CHALLENGING HERE

You're in pain most of the time

Loss of spine motion is really concerning

You can't do much because you feel you need to find a place to sit

You feel like you're closer to having surgery

YOU NEED TO GET BETTER BECAUSE

You need to learn how to manage flare ups

You'll have control over your spine problem so it doesn't control you

You'll have a fighting chance to avoid back surgery.

THE BOTTOM LINE

REMEMBER

The key to making it out of Phase 1 is not doing anything to irritate your back. People that prematurely sign up for spine surgery have often not figured out how to manage flare-ups. They may have chosen not to have surgery if they were able to figure out how to manage their back pain better because then they'd feel like they had control over their spine health.

You may need to temporarily stop a few activities that usually flare up your back, even if they're good for you in other ways. It's not forever, it's just for as long as it takes for you to flare down. Eventually, you'll be better able to tolerate standing and being on your feet more **WITHOUT** aggravating your back.

There are several organizations that track the number of spine surgeries performed each year. Estimates range from 1 million to 1.5 million spine surgeries performed each year since 2022. They speculate that 200,000 spine surgeries were unnecessarily performed on medicare beneficiaries alone. Who knows what that number is for the entire US? Spine surgery is expected to increase each year, especially in Americans over 60.

It's our belief that the majority of these spine surgeries could be avoided if people just learn to:

- Manage back pain flare-ups
- Use off-loading
- Correct muscle imbalances
- Maintain strength in the right muscles

Sadly, many people who have spine surgery continue to have back pain for years after surgery. If you can master these points, then you'll have an excellent chance of avoiding surgery and enjoying all the things you love without your back slowing you down.



DO YOU WANT TO GET MORE HELP TO HEAL YOUR BACK PROBLEM AND AVOID SURGERY?



What the surgeon says right now: If your back hurts you bad enough and your X-ray / MRI shows you've got arthritis, stenosis, or a disc problem then you should have spine surgery

What's possible: You can figure out how to consistently calm down your flared up back. Then learn how to fix the root problem so you don't flare up so easily. At that point, you'll have more confidence in your back to avoid going through a spinal surgery like a fusion or a laminectomy.

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN THE PROGRAM](#)

IF YOU DON'T GET BACK PAIN UNDER CONTROL AND FIX THE ROOT PROBLEM THAT CAUSES IT, YOU'RE LIKELY GOING TO HAVE BACK SURGERY AT SOME POINT...

YOU MIGHT BE JUST A FEW MONTHS, WEEKS, EVEN DAYS AWAY FROM FIGURING OUT HOW TO HEAL YOUR BACK PROBLEM.

**THIS IS
WHAT'S
COMING NEXT...**



PHASE 2:

FIX THE MUSCLE IMBALANCE

Phase 2: Fix The Muscle Imbalance		
DAY PAIN	1-3 days per week	
NIGHT PAIN	1-3 days per week	
TIME ON FEET	10-30 minutes	
GLUTES/ABS	Cannot flex left and right sides individually. Cannot keep thigh muscles from flexing.	
MOBILITY	Consistent pain bending or twisting in 1 direction	
	What it's like today	Next level to reach
ACTIVITIES	Can do many normal things, but need to take breaks at times. It gets worse as the day goes on.	Can get to most activities without making it worse. Can even walk for exercise.
X-RAY / MRI	Normal to Severe and anywhere in between.	It will probably look the same as before.
RE: SURGERY	You'll likely need spine surgery in 1-2 years	Delaying spine surgery to 3-5 years
I SAY THIS OUTLOUD	<i>"Let me sit for 15 minutes and then I can keep going." "I'm gaining weight because I haven't been able to exercise." "I'm going to pay for this for a couple of days."</i>	<i>"I can exercise now." "It only hurts once in a while if I really push it." "My back isn't 100% but I guess this is what's it's like at my age now."</i>
BACK FEELS LIKE	Stiff in the morning and after sitting for a long time. Can still become painful with too much activity or if I make a bad move.	Little to no back stiffness. Can take on a busy day without feeling miserable for while after.
MAIN CONCERNING THOUGHT	<i>"I don't think I need surgery at this time. I'm hopeful to get my back feeling great again."</i>	<i>"I hope I can keep my back feeling like this so I can avoid spine surgery."</i>
HOW IT AFFECTS LIFE	Open to taking pain medications, using devices and braces...but no longer relying on them. Avoids stairs and uneven ground. At times uses hands to hold on to walls and furniture while walking	Back pain comes and goes, but is never bad enough to need medications or doctor visits. There are definitely a handful of activities that are avoided because they will hurt. Balance is good.
Bottom Line	Normal activities are okay but not for too long.	Improve by getting conscious control over glutes & abs.

2 YOUR PHASE

Phase 2 Overview



This video provides an overview of what goals & activities to focus on in Phase 2

**Day Pain 1-3
days/wk**

**Night Pain 1-3
days/wk**

**Time On Feet
10-30 Minutes**

**Abs & Glutes Can
Flex, But Other
Muscle Flex Too**

**Pain With Bending
/ Twisting In 1
Direction**



WHEN YOU'RE IN PHASE 2

In Phase 2, you think about your back at least once or twice a week. Especially when you do 1 or 2 things that are just a little much for you. The problem activities are usually things like:

- Walking for exercise or in a large store
- Sitting for long periods of time, especially when traveling.
- Heavy yard work
- Lifting heavy objects
- Exercising in the gym
- Leaning over for too long

It's usually not bad enough to go see the doctor, but it might be painful enough for you to take pain medication and take the rest of the day off.

If you do visit the doctor and have an X-ray or MRI, you might be told you have minor OR severe back problems. Keep in mind that the severity of what the doctor thinks about your X-rays or MRI might not line up with how you feel in your back right now.

People in Phase 2 are looking for exercises, stretches, or other treatments they can do to improve their back problem when it flares up. They'll search Google and YouTube for help. Some might even do physical therapy to get help with exercises and stretches.

Stretches often help for a few weeks...but then become less and less effective.

Walking and cycling often feels good at first...but people hit a wall after 1-2 months where they can't do more walking or cycling without making the back worse.

Exercises from doctors and physical therapists focus on getting the back muscles stronger. This might relieve back pain for a short time...but it nearly always ends up causing worse back pain. It all depends on how severe your muscle imbalance is and how irritated your lumbar spine is at the time. The worse the irritation and the imbalance, the quicker you'll feel lower back pain when doing back exercises.

If your lower back irritation isn't that bad, then you'll tend to feel "okay" during exercise but then have aches and pains in your back at other times - like when you're sitting around doing nothing active.

The reason back aches come on then is because the back muscle exercises you've been doing are effective in getting the back stronger. Now they're adding pressure to the spine joints and discs because the muscle imbalance is getting worse. This is why it will hurt when you're doing something easy like picking a sock up from the floor or putting on your shoes.



2

THE BIG CHALLENGE:

START FIXING THE MUSCLE IMBALANCE



What keeps people stuck in Phase 2 is that they don't know they should be working on fixing the muscle imbalances that cause back pain.

They know they should be working on something! They often follow the guidance of healthcare professionals and pursue back exercises, back stretches, walking programs, and purchase a stationary bike or treadmill to use at home.

But rarely (if ever!) do any healthcare professionals who help people with spine problems discuss or guide their patients to focus on fixing the muscle imbalance. They don't get taught about it in medical schools, and they default to offering medications, injections, and surgery.

Even physical therapists don't offer much help. They focus on helping people who are recovering from surgery. PTs give you the same exercises as the person who just had a spinal fusion surgery in hopes it will help you heal from back arthritis. But it's a completely different treatment process to help someone preventing surgery versus helping them avoid surgery!

Most people in Phase 2 have difficulty using their abdominal and glute muscles well. They can usually make them flex, but cannot do it consistently. In order to move into Phase 3, it's **CRITICAL** that you can flex your lower abdominals and your glutes (each side independently) without the back muscles and thighs also flexing.

You cannot skip this part! It may seem silly at first, but when you start connecting the dots on how challenging it is to use your abs and glutes now... then you realize it's been a really long time since you've even thought about using them...then it starts to make sense that you need glutes for just about any everyday activity...and they haven't been participating enough (or at all!)

...Now your back and thigh muscles have compensated so badly that they've squashed your spine joints and discs for years leaving your back feeling older than your actual age.

Any exercise you do will fail until you figure out how to make your abdominals and glutes work when you need them.

2

TREATMENTS TO FOCUS ON

IN PHASE 2

Focus on using the following treatments in Phase 2. The intent in these exercises is to gain better control over the muscle groups to increase your coordination. The 10 second holds are to help your nerves gain better control of your muscles. Although strengthening will happen naturally, gaining strength should not be the focus here.

1

Abdominal Muscle Foundation Exercises

- Abdominal activation holds - lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Slide a hand under your lower back right above your tailbone. Practice pressing your back flat against your hand to get your lower abdominal muscles to tighten. Avoid feeling your upper abdominals (above the belly button) activate more than your lower abdominal muscles.
- Level 1 Abdominal curl holds - lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat. Bring your chin to your chest making a double chin. Flatten your back to activate your lower abs. Reach your fingertips toward your kneecaps. Hold it where you feel your lower abs work the most.
- Level 2 Abdominal curl holds - same as level 1, except instead of reaching your hands to your kneecaps, aim your reach about 1 foot above your kneecaps. Maintain a double chin and back flat the whole time so you continue to target the lower abdominal muscles.

2

Glute Muscle Foundation Exercises

- Glute Holds - practice tightening the glute muscles and holding it for 10 seconds. Practice it lying face down, face up, seated, and standing.
- Alternating glute holds - Practice alternating flexing the left and right sides individually. Then practice lying down, sitting, and standing.
- Bridges - Focus on holding it for 10 seconds at a time and making sure to fatigue the glutes more than any other muscle.
Clams - 10 second holds without allowing thigh muscles to work.

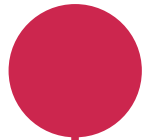
3

Walking

- Retrain yourself to walk while using your abdominal and glute muscles properly. Practice gently flexing your lower abs in standing so that you can do this while walking. Then mildly flex your glute as you bear weight on one leg. Relax that side as you shift your weight to the other leg and flex the glute on the opposite side. Practice slowly alternating glute contractions while maintaining abdominal activation as you walk. Over time, make it more casual so that you can walk like this all the time.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE IN PHASE 2

Work on treatments from Phase 2 until you improve enough to move into Phase 3 and begin the next treatments.



Your goal is to go from having these symptom criteria:

- Day Pain 1-3 days/wk
- Night Pain 1-3 days/wk
- Time On Feet 10-30 Minutes
- Abs & Glutes flex...but so do back & thigh muscles
- Pain bending/twisting in 1 direction

To having these symptom criteria:

- Day pain < 1 day in 2 weeks
- Night pain < 1 day in 2 weeks
- Tolerating being on your feet standing and walking combined for 30-60 minutes
- Abs & Glutes work well while walking and most other activities. (They just get tired fast)
- Pain bending/twisting in 1 direction only in certain activities or part of the day

***You cannot move out of Phase 2 until ALL goals have been reached or surpassed.**

****Another way of saying this is, you cannot stop doing Phase 2 treatments until you no longer have any of the symptom criteria from Phase 2.**

*****Don't move onto Phase 3 unless you meet ALL the symptom criteria for Phase 3**

THE BOTTOM LINE

**PHASE 2 IS ABOUT WAKING UP KEY MUSCLES THAT
TAKE PRESSURE OFF THE SPINE JOINTS AND DISCS**

**Better Abdominal Activation + Better Glute Activation =
LESS SPINAL PRESSURE**

WHY IT'S CHALLENGING HERE

You can do stuff but it hurts to do too much

Overall health is suffering because you can't be too active

You live in the tension of the pain isn't that bad, but it's bad there's still pain

YOU NEED TO GET BETTER BECAUSE

What if you need to stand for >30 min?

You need to exercise to keep the rest of your body healthy

You need to optimize your spine health to avoid surgery

REMEMBER

The key to making it out of Phase 2 is fixing the root muscle imbalance that causes back problems. For most people, it's abdominal & glute muscle weakness that are the main problems. Gaining control over these muscles is the 1st step. Using them while walking is the 2nd step.

When it comes to back problems, healthcare professionals are trained to push people toward using medications, injections, and having surgery. Even PTs tend to specialize in helping people after having a spine surgery, so they don't know what's best for someone looking to avoid surgery.

Fixing muscle imbalances is not researched and probably won't be for decades. Just because there isn't research doesn't mean it means we have yet to study it.

As a result of this, the healthcare industry isn't trained to teach and guide you on this. You need to try this treatment approach and see for yourself how it can benefit your spine problem.

Worst case scenario - your back gets gradually worse and you end up having a spinal fusion or laminectomy like most people with back problems.

Best case scenario - you learn how to make your muscles work right, solve the root of your spine problem, get back to being active, and never spend time thinking about spine surgery again.

You might be just a few months away from massive success.

READY FOR **EXPERT HELP** TO **HEAL BACK PAIN AND** **AVOID SURGERY?**



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