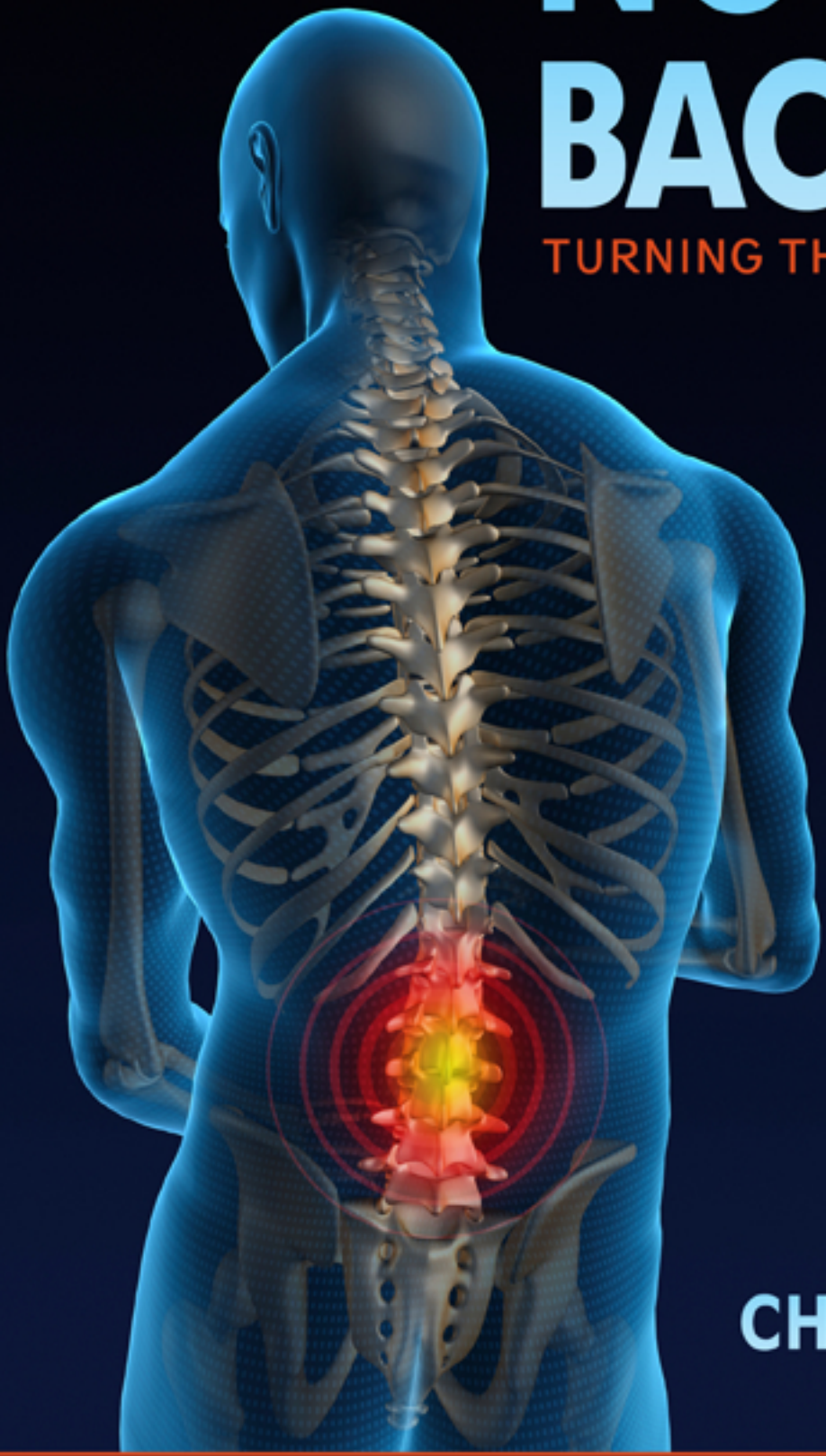
NO MORE BACK PAIN

TURNING THE TIDE ON BACK PAIN



by

CHRIS HENDRICKS

The Only System That Addresses
the Fundamental Reasons You Have Back Pain

NO MORE BACK PAIN!

Turning The Tide On Back Pain

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Introduction

Hi - I'm Chris Hendricks. I'll be your guide through this book to a life free of back pain. As a professional bodyworker and ergonomic specialist of 20 years' experience and martial artist of almost 30 years' experience, I've seen that everyone, no matter how young, old, injured or not, can be free of back pain.

Over the past three decades, I've trained and worked with some of the very brightest minds in the bodywork and martial arts fields and as such, am bringing my unique perspective to bear on the problem of back pain.

You're probably wondering what a martial artist can say about back pain, other than giving you 15 different ways to cause it. That's actually EXACTLY the reason that my martial arts experience is relevant: I know literally hundreds of ways to cause pain in the human body - especially in how to damage the joint systems of the body and how to unbalance people. To put it another way, I have an extensive body of knowledge and experience in how the body **doesn't** move - what to do to make it hurt or break it. This lends an excellent counterpoint to my training and experience as a bodyworker.

As a bodyworker I have over 1000 hours of training in massage and a further two years of training with Judith Aston personally, the founder of Aston-Patterning®. That, along with my collaboration with Carolyn Braddock and many other gifted bodyworkers and teachers have made the sum total of my approach both powerful and very effective, qualities that are paramount to the martial arts that I study.

As a martial artist, I hold black belts in 4 different martial arts systems. Owing to the enormous generosity of my teachers, notably among them Robert Mickey and George Kirby, I have been able to see both sides of the coin in biomechanics - the whole picture.

More importantly, both of my fields of expertise are all about how to move powerfully and fluidly - how to identify movement that isn't biomechanically efficient, release the blocks that prevent it and simultaneously show people how to move in ways that prevent its reoccurrence.

In this book and video series, I'll take you through the distillation of my experience and show you why you're having problems with your back and how you can change your experience for the better - simply and easily.

This program is based on two simple truths you can prove to yourself very quickly:

1) There are fundamental things that cause the body to have pain.

2) The body is pliable and, just as it shaped itself to your demands (as it is now), it can re-shape itself to a new form – one that works FOR you.

3) You have the ability and the power to change those things so that your body can be free from pain.

In my profession as a bodyworker, I've discovered several simple movements restore the natural, easeful functioning of the back. They work so quickly and so well that they may seem like magic to you.

Since I know the science behind the magic, I'm like the illusionist's assistant who knows that it will work, even though the audience maintains their sense of disbelief. The movements themselves are not magical, but the effects that I have seen in the many people I teach them to are.

Fortunately, I'm not asking you to take it on faith – you'll feel the results almost immediately. Of course, if you've got a serious problem, it may take a little longer, but you WILL see results.

With that in mind, first we'll discuss the primary causes of back pain. I'll show you some examples of what conditions contribute to back pain and then I'll present some simple yet very effective things YOU can do in order to improve your relationship with your back.

Lastly, and most importantly for the purposes of this book, we'll go over the movements and theory behind them) that will see your pain (in the words of most of my clients over the years) "just...go away."

Ideas To Wrap Your Head Around

There are four important foundational ideas to understand if you're going to solve the back pain equation.

The first is that nothing happens in a vacuum – your back pain is not just about your back. It's about the sum total of how your body lines up in gravity, the past insults it's received, the level of slack you have in your system, the stress level of your life….you get the point.

The second is that you can't work on just your back and expect it to get better. That'd be like getting your car serviced and telling the mechanic only to fix the things that he can see from the top.

The third and probably most difficult to understand is that, 95% of the time, your pain is NOT where the problem is. Even if you have an actual disk problem, yes, you do have a problem there, but that's NOT where the problem came from. I'll explain this more further along in the book, but It's important to realize that even though I'll have you working on seemingly unrelated things, it's ALL about healing your back, and having a happier existence.

Fourth: You'll want to understand that, for the most part, it's not the single insult that does it (the car accident, the fall, etc.), it's the accumulation, over long periods of time, that builds a weakness into your structure and that it's that very weakness that finally gave out. Said another way, it's not the big things, it's the little ones you should pay attention to. Musculo-skeletal problems don't 'just happen' (unless of course you've had some sort of impact trauma - in which case you'll need this program more than ever).

Everyone has 'weak spots' in their structure – they develop slowly over time, mostly by how we use (or DON'T use) our bodies. The vast majority of the time, it's a "straw that broke the camel's back" situation – thousands of tiny insults to the system add up and overwhelm the body's ability to handle them, and it happens over time.

Pep Talk Break!

This is NOT an excuse to beat yourself up – it's actually a reason to celebrate. Why? Because if we created it, we can do something about it to change it - to something that works FOR us. It's about taking responsibility in a healthy way - not as a punishment, but as a realization that because things that you've been doing have created this situation, you can change what you're doing and change the results you're getting. To me, this is extremely exciting!

You're Never Too Old - an example to inspire you!

When I lived in France, I treated an 80 year-old woman who had a severe scoliosis. In the x-rays, you could see that her spine actually spiraled. Needless to say, she had constant back pain, and had been that way for years - possibly decades. She felt miserable because she couldn't sleep very well, couldn't walk very well, had trouble getting up and down but most importantly for her, she told me, she couldn't clean the house! It was a matter of pride for her to be able to clean her own house and she hated that it now took several days because of the pain. The medical community had given up on her - that is to say, given her pain killers and told her that there was no cure for what she had.

She was recommended by a friend of a friend (who coincidentally also had a case of scoliosis and recurring back pain). I worked with her and gave her these very exercises specific to her needs. In the beginning she had a very hard time doing the program, (decades of milking cows and farming will put a BIG kink in your body). She persisted, and with a little gentle bodywork, the exercises got easier and easier.

After about 4 weeks of doing them with her, I had to go to the UK and wasn't able to see her for a couple weeks. I told her to do her exercises and I would see her when I returned.

I got back from my trip, returned to her home and was greeted by a smile. I hadn't actually seen her smile before - it was more like a grimace up until then. I asked her if she had done her exercises while I was gone.

"Every day," she said. "Really?" I replied (finding it a rare and pleasant treat that someone had actually done their homework!).

"Yes, twice a day."

"Twice a day? And how do you feel?" I asked.

"Not totally better, but healing. But most important, I cleaned my house today and I have no pain at all."

Needless to say, I was completely bowled over. Not surprised, but very pleased. I had anticipated that it would take a little while longer (she had had the problems quite some time), so her determination and tenacity were really heart-warming, and paid her huge dividends. She made positive changes at 80; for the rest of us there's no excuse.

Fitness and your Back Pain

What does this mean for you? The bottom line is you need to maintain a certain level of fitness that will support your activity level. What does 'fitness' really look like? Is it bulging muscles? Is it the ability to run a marathon? Or swim two miles in open surf? I think that fitness levels vary with what people want and what their lives and jobs require of them, but the basic understanding of what fitness is, is very important.

My Triangle Theory

Fitness, in my mind, is a tripod (or a triangle, depending on how I'm currently describing it, as I tend to use these words interchangeably). A triangle is a very stable structure. Humans have been using triangles for thousands of years for everything from milk stools to the pyramids. The pyramids are still here after 5,000 years, and they are built using the principle of interlocking triangles.

So, fitness is a tripod built on three things: strength (to lift what you want), endurance (to carry it as far as you want) and flexibility (so that you can move and do something else afterwards). If you take away one of the points of the tripod, though, it becomes a bipod. While a tripod (or triangle) is very stable, a bipod is not. If you take away one of these three elements - strength, endurance or flexibility - you will discover that

the results often manifest in the form of pain. I've noticed that if people are going to have a problem in their body, it is usually on the level of flexibility. Although you may not want to lift a truck or run 100 miles per week or need to be able to do the full splits, you need to be aware that there are three essential areas of fitness that must be seen to...on a regular basis.

Why most back pain relief programs don't work: The Truth About Symmetry

If you do stretching and toning exercises and still have back pain…that's not unusual. It's likely that there are two things you haven't been paying attention to. Pay attention to these two things and your results will amaze you.

1. **Sequence**: Sequence determines results. As one of my teachers explained using this example - if you take eggs, butter, a pan and heat, you can make scrambled eggs. However you need to crack the eggs into a bowl and whisk them up, then melt the butter in the pan and add the eggs. If you don't do it in this order you'll get a less than desirable result. To effectively eliminate back pain you need to stretch the right groups of muscles IN THE RIGHT SEQUENCE. You must stretch muscles that are known as antagonist pairs (think opposites holding the tension between them) in order to effect any lasting change in the joints. If you say to yourself, "My hamstrings are tight, therefore I'll stretch my hamstrings to get more flexible," that will produce only limited results for the effort you put in.

Why? Because the muscles on the opposite side of the joint are used to a certain amount of tension from the opposite side - in fact, they require a certain amount of tension to be stable. The muscles on opposite sides of any joint are actually hooked together in your nervous system in a couple of ways. The first is called reciprocal inhibition (which is important for stretching) and the second (and related idea) is antagonist pairing. Reciprocal inhibition means that when one set of muscles contracts, it sends signals to its partner on the other side of the joint (the antagonist pair - the muscle which does the opposite function) to inhibit its stretch reflex; to keep it from automatically contracting in response to being lengthened by the firing of the muscle on the opposite side. This is a

long-winded way of saying that your nervous system is using and sending signals to and from both sides of the joint to move.

Here's what that looks like in your body. If you reduce the tension only in your hamstrings (the backs of your legs that feel taught when you try to touch your toes), your hip flexors will actually reprogram your hamstrings to be tighter because the hip flexors need them to be that way. The tension levels on one side are matched by the length and/or tension on the other side. There is a balance, worked through the nervous system. If you change one side without changing the other, the unchanged side will undo what you've just done – that's why I've had people tell me, "Stretching doesn't work." It's not that it doesn't work, it's a matter of sequence determining result.

In this book I'll tell you the most effective pairs and how to sequence them when we get into the exercises.

2. **Fundamental Asymmetry**: Using the relationship between your antagonist pairs is very important, but even more important, one concept that most exercise regimes miss, is the crucial point that the body is fundamentally asymmetrical.

That's right, I said **Fundamentally Asymmetrical**.

Without the application of this principle, nothing will actually change. You can stretch and exercise until the cows come home, but if you don't do it in a way that alters the basic muscular imbalances and alignment problems (which are basically one and the same thing) - i.e., respecting the asymmetry of your body - nothing will ever really change.

What you're really trying to do when you stretch is to correct the underlying imbalances between bone/muscle/joint systems. However, you will have only limited success unless you change the RATIO of imbalance between muscle groups that has caused these imbalances.

Here is the debate that follows most often when people are introduced to the idea that their bodies are asymmetrical:

"But, I am symmetrical!"

"No, really, you're not - and it's not a bad thing...it's just how it is."

"Really," they say, "I AM symmetrical...look at me! I've got two arms, two legs, two eyes..."

"OK," I say. "How many lungs do you have?"

"Uhm...two."

"And are they the same on both sides?"

"…I'm not sure."

"Your right lung has 3 lobes, but, in order to make room for your heart, your left lung has only two. Is that symmetrical?"

"Well, no...not really."

"And, here, look in the mirror. Do you see how your eyes aren't really at the same level? Neither your ears…?"

Saying that you're asymmetrical is **not** saying that you're broken; it's more to get you to grasp the fundamental truth that will, if you use it, make your life much easier. If we accept that the body is asymmetrical AND that it is trying to reach symmetry, we can help it only by treating it **asymmetrically**.

Now stop and re-read the previous paragraph until the idea really sinks in as this is the most important concept in this book. When you've got the above idea, think this thought (or repeat it out loud) until you feel it resonate in your body: "My body is doing exactly what it's supposed to be doing. If I'm having pain, I need to adjust my course, give my body different directions to follow, and all will be well."

It's been my experience that when the body is treated in a symmetrical way, for example during a massage - if both legs are rubbed the same way - the underlying pattern gets reinforced, not changed. It might feel good (usually does – humans need to be touched for our basic well-being), but

it doesn't change the pattern - in other words, the cause of the problem is still there.

If, on the other hand, you work with the body by respecting its asymmetry and treating it differently on opposing sides, things change very rapidly for the better. What you're doing by treating things in an asymmetrical manner is to change the differential ratio of tension that is at the base of the problem that you're having. If your intention is to actually solve the back pain problem, you need to look for something that actually treats you as you are - something that addresses this fundamental imbalance, not some model of what a human "should" look like.

As an illustration of how asymmetry can get confused with an actual problem: The number of times that a client has told me that they have (or have been told that they have) a "short" leg is almost without number. Here's the truth: if you or your x-rays have been actually measured with a tape measure, then yes, you may have an actual discrepancy. However, in the 19 years that I've been working with people, I've found 2 people with an actual discrepancy (of more than a couple of millimeters, which is…asymmetrical…right?) that wasn't related to an accident or some sort of disease.

What's more likely is that your hip and pelvis have twisted through misuse over the years and conspired to hide a few centimeters of length. It's very common for people to hide anywhere between 1 and 3 centimeters of length on one side or the other, very occasionally 4 or 5.

Why is this important? When your body is holding one leg shorter than the other, you will be jamming yourself with every step. Yes, the impact is very small, but when you add it up over the years, it becomes a lot. Imagine a little gremlin with a small ball peen hammer following you around and tapping your low back with every step. Might not be a bad thing (perhaps a little annoying) for a few days or even a few weeks, but after a few months or years it will become a serious problem.

This is one of the things that the program in this book will address, in degrees, by allowing you to redress this imbalance with a routine that you can shape specifically to YOUR body.

No More Back Pain

It's highly likely that if you're reading this, you've been to the doctor, the chiropractor, the physical therapist, etc. You've been to their office multiple times, and had them do the same thing to you over and over again. The relief is temporary (and blessed) when it happens, but then it returns. More about why it's temporary in a moment, but let's look at what some common practices are for back pain.

Medication: Medication masks the problem

Maybe they gave you some sort of medication. This can be a good thing in the short term, but go into your local drug store and look at the huge variety of over-the-counter pain medications you can buy. We want instant pain relief - and why not? Sometimes, the use of a pain-killer is a good thing - it allows us to function.

But to use pain killers long term with no change in other areas of your life reveals a serious flaw in this approach The flaw being that you haven't addressed the underlying problem. It's a good news/bad news situation. On one hand, you can't feel the pain. This is good, because it doesn't hurt. On the other hand, it's not good because pain is your body's way of telling you something is wrong and, if you can't feel it, you're going to continue doing what you've been doing which got you into trouble in the first place.

It is almost a cliché now to say that if you keep doing what you've been doing, you're going to keep getting what you've been getting. Albert Einstein once defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result. There is a reason that sayings become clichés: they have a large element of truth behind them. This is very important when it comes to your relationship with your body.

In order to experience the magical results from the very beginning of your work using this program you need to make a fundamental shift in your relationship with your body.

The big shift is this: your body is your ally, not your enemy. Your body is not giving you pain signals to be spiteful; it's trying to tell you exactly what it needs. Pain is one of the ways it does that. Pain says, "Stop! Something is not working properly!"

Let's use the car analogy again for a moment. If you're driving your car and one of the warning lights on the dashboard comes on, say for instance the oil light, what do you do? You add oil to the engine of course, but what is the oil light really saying? It's saying that it's low on oil, of course, but why? That's the essential question. Now I confess to not always asking myself this one - and I'm no mechanic but, it could be any number of things. If you choose to just keep adding oil to the engine every time the oil light goes on, have you really solved the problem? Could you be heading down the road towards a really serious problem with your car? Most likely.

Now, think about pain as your body's oil light. You can pop a couple of ibuprofen (add oil) when the oil light goes on. That works. But why is the pain there? And more importantly, doesn't pushing the problem to one side allow it to fester and get worse?

The critical difference between you and a car is that you can buy a new car. As of yet, modern medical science can't replace your body. Sure it can replace pieces of it, but that carries its own set of problems. You need to take good care of your body so that it functions at optimal levels for as long as possible. Ignoring and pushing the signal of ongoing pain to one side is a long-term recipe for disaster.

Why your treatment hasn’t worked

This may be a controversial statement, but I have found that the treatment methods that most doctors, chiropractors and physical therapists use to treat back pain don't really work in the long term.

If I had $10 for every time a client came in to see me and said, "I've been to the doctor, the physical therapist, the chiropractor, the astrologer, ...etc. and it worked for a little while, but the pain is back now - worse than before," I would have been able to retire to some lovely island paradise long ago. Now, I’m not going to paint all of these health care practitioners in this light - there are gifted and insightful people working in all of these professions - and I’ll be the first to say that the same thing applies to my profession as well; it’s just been my experience and the experience of my clients that the ‘treatment’ approach far outweighs the ‘solving the underlying problem’ approach.

So why don't they work? These treatment methods are, for the most part, based on:

1. Strengthening muscles that are already too tight
2. Working with muscles that have very little to do with the actual problem or,
3. Forcing things back into place that are actually trying to compensate for the system being out of balance as a whole.

The problem is not a lack of strength - most often it's a lack of flexibility.

Let me qualify that for a moment, though. Ask yourself where that lack of flexibility came from. Sure, most folks out there can’t touch their toes, but that’s not what I mean when I say “lack of flexibility”. What I’m referring to is how your whole body balances itself. Have you ever seen one of those baby toys that were popular when my daughters were little - with wooden rods, and elastic that babies can mash and squish and

throw across the room and they bounce back to their shape - the "tensegrity toy".

Tensegrity (a combination of the words 'tension' and 'integrity', describes a structure which uses a balance of tension (muscles, tendons and ligaments) and compression (bones) to maintain its integrity. The huge advantage of a structure like this is that the forces that act upon it are distributed along the entire structure, instead of being localized at one spot. This is what I mean. Change your image of flexibility from a gymnast who can do the splits to this model of balance and you'll understand the concept.

If the body is misaligned through chronic misuse, trauma or habitual use patterns that don't serve it, your body's natural intelligence will over-stabilize the body, in order to keep misaligned body parts from causing further damage.

Your body will immediately shore-up or counterbalance for any area that moves out of balance – that's how it keeps you in balance. Unfortunately, unless you take steps to keep yourself in good balance, those stabilizations, because they are fundamentally flawed, grow and recruit other areas of the body to help them – the result is an increasing lack of flexibility – not from being tight, but from the body ratcheting down in order to keep you moving.

<u>Important Note:</u>

Good balance is like DNA - it's unique to each person - don't try to copy someone's posture, or physique! I know that the look and feel of balance in my body will look different from the look and feel of balance in the body of someone much taller. The fundamental principles will be the same, but the expression will, to the untrained eye, look different.

Let's face it – we've outstripped our evolution. In less than 200 years (less than a blink of an eye in terms of how long humans have been on the planet), our effective life span has doubled. This is fantastic, as living longer is definitely a good thing; but it also creates other challenges. Our body's compensatory mechanisms were developed to handle problems for our effective lifetime (about 30-40 years).

Your body's job is to keep moving (and not as Meg Ryan said in French Kiss "as nature intended - in a car"). Prior to what we call modern civilization, if you stopped moving, you got left behind (and probably eaten by something nasty). Your body evolved a superb system of compensation that allows you to keep moving well without doing much of anything – but only for a limited period of time – somewhere in the 35-40 year range.

Since we're now living about twice that long, we now get to experience the downside of that compensatory mechanism, unless we do something about it. Over time, things ratchet so tight that we can't handle what seems like a minor insult to the system (e.g. "But all I did was just bent over to pick up the paper on the floor and…POP!")

So, if you've ever wondered why people get to their late 30's and early 40's and 'all of a sudden' their bodies seem to pack it in, this is the reason. There are hundreds of books out there focusing on aging and how to avoid it, which is not my focus here. However the exercises in this book will enhance any other work you are currently doing to feel well.

Now - flexibility does not mean being able to pretzel yourself like an Yoga guru. It does mean that your joints have sufficient space and range of motion and your muscles have enough elasticity to be able to perform their functions without unduly stressing themselves. In other words, that your body has enough "slack" in the system to maintain relatively good alignment that allows large amounts of kinetic energy to pass through it.

Kinetic energy is the energy carried by moving objects - or body parts. If it can't do that, the kinetic energy created by your movement gets trapped inside your system, bouncing around like a pinball and creating problems. Pain and non-specific stiffness (other than the good-workout-soreness/fatigue) is a sign that this is occurring.

Any area of your body where you have a lack of flexibility causes the areas on either side (or end) of it to work that much harder. This is to say that if your knee is sore, it could be that your hip is tight enough that your knee is trying to take over function for it (and suffering because of the added load). Your body still needs to do that movement, but that specific area can't do it as well (if at all) anymore. The joint systems on

either side of the problem area are obliged to do their tasks AND the tasks of the problem area – in other words, they need to do double duty.

This is a great system for keeping you going, but the areas that are working extra hard aren't designed to do the work of the joint that's not working in the long term. It puts a lot of stress on the system – they can only do it for so long and then...they can't, hence the pain.

Let's use an example from our modern workplace phenomenon of "downsizing". The management sees that they can put more on the bottom line if they have fewer people doing more work – for the same wages that they were getting before. That's great for management – they look good to the shareholders, because the profits rise, but it stinks for the workers who remain, because they're totally stressed with the amount of work they're now expected to do.

A lot of the time, they can handle it, but more often than we might like, they burn out, because they're trying to do two or three people's work on one person's work schedule. Over the long term, it's just not sustainable. To put it another way, it's just a matter of time.

Back to bodies...When they are doing the extra work, the muscles and joints on either side of the afflicted area are straining to take the load and keep the whole system stable. They have to ratchet things tighter and tighter in order to sustain the misalignment and keep going.

If you remember the tensegrity model from earlier, the idea of give and slack in your system that creates healthy balance, and now consider the idea that the cause of pain and source of pain are, in most circumstances, not the same, you'll start to understand why the relief you experience is only temporary.

<u>So - what causes the pain?</u>

There are two main reasons for pain in the muscles and joints.

One is a misalignment of the body and the other is a muscular imbalance. The chicken and egg part is this: some part of the body is misaligned and is either causing or being caused by muscular imbalances. Form follows function and function follows form. What that means is that the way

something is shaped in large part determines how it moves and, conversely, how something moves has an effect on how it is shaped. The human body responds well to the stresses that we place on it, adapting to those stresses by changing itself (developing muscles and bone density, calluses, etc.), therefore, the way you move has a large effect on how your body shapes itself.

Muscular imbalances can arise from movement patterns that don't work, causing holding patterns that solidify over time AND/OR from some insult that causes an imbalance that causes ineffective movement patterns and steadily worsens over time. The results are the same.

Now back to why the regular strengthening regimes don't work.

The solution is <u>not</u> to make the area stronger! Making it stronger will only give your body the capacity to ratchet down even tighter. To return to the car analogy for a moment: if the alignment of your tires is off on your car and you take it in and ask your mechanic to tighten the bolts that hold the alignment in place in order to solve the problem, he'll laugh out loud.

Yes, having said that, you CAN use exercises to 'teach' the body how to move properly, but the underlying problem, once you've gotten to the pain stage, is solved most easily by adding more slack to the system.

Correct the underlying problem (the muscular imbalances and misalignments) and the body heals itself very rapidly. Does this mean you shouldn't get yourself a thorough work-up from your doctor, just to make sure it's not something more nefarious? Absolutely not. Does it mean that your doctor may not know everything? It just might.

Fortunately and unfortunately, most medical care today focuses on two things: drugs and surgery. An MD client once said that he could do amazing things with a needle and thread to repair problems in the heart, but his back pain absolutely baffled him. This is from a cardio-thoracic surgeon at the top of his game - he could make 1mm (0.04 inches!) stitches in the heart...by hand! (Try it sometime, if you think that this might be easy, remember that he does it on a living being, not just an old sock.)

Physicians spend years learning to diagnose diseases and learn what medications and surgery will work for these problems. This is a very good thing, as they are experts at KEEPING YOU ALIVE - and I am extremely grateful for this! But we need to remember that physicians don't know everything – especially about being WELL. How much time do they spend on functional anatomy - the way that the muscles and bones work together to produce movement? Perhaps 1-3 months in the space of 8 years of training.

The Stress Collector

Because of our movement patterns and activities, the body collects stress during the day and needs to be de-stressed at regular intervals. To come back to the car analogy once again, you drive your car for a certain number of miles and then you take it in for a service. This makes sense, right? If you don't keep you car in good repair (get the oil changed, tires rotated, update the software, change the fluids, change the spark plugs, etc.) it will wear out and break down sooner.

Here's the key question: why on earth would you take your car in for regular service and NOT do the same for your body? Do you think it doesn't need it? Especially in today's high-stress, fast-paced world?

I highly recommend to everyone that they get a regular "tune-up" with the best bodyworker they can find. And, more importantly, that they follow a simple, effective and easy routine several times a week (if not every day) that keeps their body in the finest tune possible. A good bodyworker is worth their weight in gold - a simple and effective anti-stress routine is worth the same weight in diamonds.

Here are some tips to finding a good bodyworker - which is worth pursuing as they are sometimes few and far between.

* They will have taken advanced training, or an apprenticeship, after they've graduated from massage school; usually one lasting more than a year. (Most all the really good programs that I've seen take several years to complete.) Look for Rolfers, Aston-Patterners® (although these are EXCEEDINGLY rare), Feldenkrais practitioners, Alexander Technique teachers and classically (of European descent) trained osteopaths.
* They will have (hopefully more than) a grasp of ergonomics and physics and how it applies to human bodies.

* They will have been doing bodywork for at least 10 years. (Yes, I know that a number of you out there will be outraged at this statement, saying that yours has just 5 years of experience, but bodyworkers burn out on average between 2-5 years after they graduate from massage school, mostly from their own poor body-use habits, so you do the math...).
* They will be the person that works on other bodyworkers in the area or that the bodyworker you know goes to see. This information may be a little tricky to get from your bodyworker, as they may not want to loose a client, but if there is any trouble with this, you may offer to have your bodyworker come sit in on your session so that they can learn, too.

A good bodyworker will help you change your relationship with your body and gravity for the better – and do it in a painless manner. People who tell you that it has to hurt to improve yourself are seriously misguided. Pain is the body's way of telling you that something is WRONG - why would you need more of it while healing?

Misalignment: why the pain is nearly always not where you think it is.

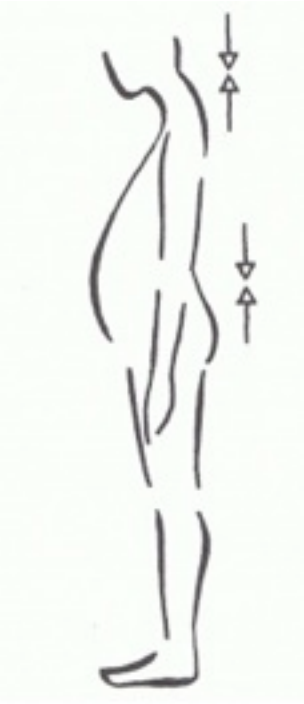
Having worked with over two thousand people in my career, the number of times I've found a problem at the site of where they had pain can be counted on the fingers of both hands. Here's what's really happening: as we've talked about already, misalignment of the body gives rise to muscular imbalance...and/or visa versa. We can get misaligned over a long period of time through poor use patterns (doing the same movement[s] improperly for a long time) or very quickly through what I call SDT (Sudden Deceleration Trauma - some form of accident).

The problem can arise from the muscular side of the equation AND/OR from the skeletal side of the equation. The muscles are unbalanced and that shortens one side of a joint system, which causes misalignment; or the bone gets misaligned, creating shortness on one side of the joint system that prevents the muscles from moving at optimal length. After a period of time the imbalances and tension tend to create a cycle of pain and diminishing movement that intensifies and feeds off of itself.

The following are the most common alignment problems I see – they are by no means the only ones. I'm presenting these more to give you an idea of how your muscles and bones are working together, NOT to have

you start thinking that this is how you are. Remember that nothing in the body is written in stone – the body is an amazingly fluid system that can adapt and change incredibly quickly.

Common Lordosis – the "Swayback"



I see this pattern mostly in men, either because they've lost tone in their abs, their hip flexors have shortened, or they're carrying a little too much beer around (you could say that they've exchanged their six-pack for a keg).

Seriously, there are many reasons why this might be the case, but the main thing is to see how these alignment problems will put stress on the back. You can see from the arrows I've put on the diagram that because the pelvis is slightly rolled forward (measured from the top) and the belly protrudes,the posterior low back is shorter, or has less length, than in the front. In order to balance this, the body has to either hold a certain amount of tension in the back to keep the body from toppling over forward AND/OR it has to move the upper body backwards to act as a counterbalance. You can also see next to the upper set of arrows that the head has been placed forward of the center-line of the body, which leads to shortening in the back of the neck. This is an excellent, and common, example of counterbalancing.

The physics of the head being displaced are very telling. For every inch forward of center, the weight load on the neck increases by 100% (no, that is not a typo...). The head weighs, on average, 12 pounds. 1 inch forward of center and the load will be 24 pounds on the neck, 2 inches forward 36, etc. You can see from this that very small misalignments can create a very heavy load. More about neck problems in my soon-to-be-released book on neck pain .

Now you have seen the misalignment of the swayback body shape, let's look at how that effects your kinetic energy flow. When we look at the low back area, there are a couple of things to notice:

1. Kinetic energy travels in small spirals through the body - preferably along the bones. If the bones are not in their natural alignment, the energy of each step literally bounces off the misaligned area, creating a mini-impact. Imagine that walking like this is having the effect of being hit in the back several hundred times per day by a very small hammer. Doesn't sound like much fun, does it?

2. The body is very pliable and amazing in its capacity to absorb and dissipate the insults (both physical and mental) that it receives. These ongoing mini-insults, however, gradually reduce the elasticity of the body, leaving it less and less room to accommodate shock and dissipate it. Why? because the body begins to brace against the shock, and it braces by tightening. (go ahead the re-read the last two sentences so you really grasp this idea!) As I've already mentioned, bracing is good in the short term, but as the bracing increases, the body has less of a cushion to dissipate stress, the shock gets more concentrated and we begin to get really damaged.

What do we do about this?

The answer is <u>not</u> to brace more. All the belts and other things designed to "help" us just push the problem to another place. The answer is to balance the structure from within.

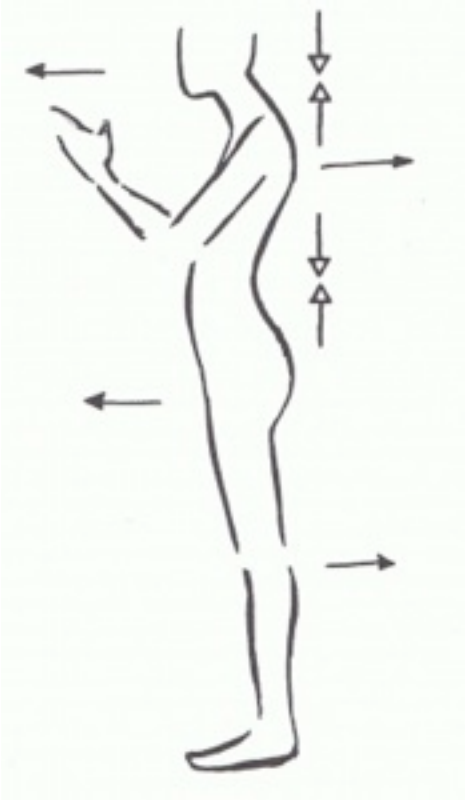
My favorite example of how using braces actually hinders us is pro bowlers. You see a pro at the beginning of their career and they just get up there and chuck the ball – they may be twisting a bit too much, but the body can accommodate it for a while. The twisting creates tension in the body, which begins to loose its elasticity. The pro finds their wrist becoming sore and so they brace it. A short while later, you notice them with an elbow brace. Why? Because the motion of the wrist still has to happen, but now because of the brace, you're asking the elbow to make the motion normally made by the wrist, and it can't – it's not built for it. The unnatural motion overcomes the compensatory capabilities of the elbow in short order. Then you'll see some sort of shoulder problem and then it will go to the back or neck.

Or I've seen it happen in the other direction – the bowler starts with a knee brace, then they have a back brace, then the shoulder problem happens, etc.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the answer is to increase the range of motion and allow the body to re-align itself through these exercises. The process that I've outlined above can be done – I've done it with people thousands of times. It just takes willingness and consistency. And I'm not talking about hours and hours every day, I'm talking about 15 minutes a day. Is being able to participate in activities we enjoy for longer and improving our quality of life worth 15 minutes a day?

The Second Common Body pattern: The Back-And-Forth Pose

This particular pattern is one that really brings to light the concepts of counterbalancing, bracing, and the accumulation of tension over time that I've been talking about.



If you look at the arrows that point away from the diagram, you'll notice that if you pick one, the one's above and/or below it point in the opposite direction. This is the body pushing (or pulling) parts of itself in different directions to counterbalance other segments. The arrows are merely illustrating this idea.

The counterbalancing will take tension to maintain, and so if you look for the shorter areas, you'll usually find a good deal of tension being used to maintain this less-than-optimal alignment.

If you look at this drawing, you will see that the body has lost a lot of length in one area (the lower back) and is trying to compensate for the misalignment and regain its balance by pushing another part of the body

in the opposite direction. The initial counter-balancing doesn't quite resolve the original problem (the body hasn't returned to it's originally designed state of balance) and so the body is required to continually recruit other parts in what turns into a back-and-forth pattern involving (in this case) the head, neck, shoulders, hips, and ribs.

I usually see two areas of pain with this pattern: the upper back and neck and the low back. In both areas again I've put the arrows again pointing towards each other to highlight the pronounced loss of length in these areas. I also have put in arrows pointing either forward or back to highlight how the segments of the body go back and forth in relation to each other.

<u>How Can Sitting Give Me Back Pain?</u>

I've put this diagram in to point out a few very important points. It's true that in our Western culture we spend an enormous amount of time sitting (at the office, in the car, in front of the television, on the airplane and more..). This is not in and of itself a bad thing, but most chairs are built to put us in a poorly-aligned position. Look at most any chair and you'll see that the back of the chair (where you put your behind) is lower than the front.

What happens to my body when I sit in a chair like this?

1. It can push all the weight of the thighs into the pelvis (by sliding backward from the tilt of the chair) and therefore, over time, shorten the muscles at the front of the thighs (if you hold a part of the body in a certain position for long enough it thinks that it's supposed to be that way all the time and makes adjustments accordingly). Then, after some time of course, when you stand, your hip joints will not fully open in

front (because you've been asking them to be shorter for years now) and you will have a similar situation to that of the first diagram (Lordosis).

2. It over-stabilizes the pelvis, keeping it from moving freely and disconnecting it from the spine. Because your bottom is firmly planted, you make your movements from your lumbar spine, which is not built for that - at least not in the long term. Your pelvis is designed to the the foundation upon which the rest of your body operates. Unlike the foundation of a house, though, it needs to be fluid so that it can move under the spine, giving it support and allowing it to stay in the best alignment possible. If your pelvis can't move, you will compromise the alignment of your spine over and over – and the little tiny muscles of the spine are NOT made to support your entire weight.

I'm very fond of telling my martial arts students that if you ask the little muscles to do the big muscles' job, you will loose. You CAN move with just your spine for a while, but your body will eventually rebel and you will hurt. The first sign is getting up from your chair and feeling "stiff".

3. Most often, because your pelvis is rolled backwards (your tailbone tucked underneath you), the chair also suggests bringing your legs off the floor. This further accentuates the backward tilt of the pelvis and further shortens the hip flexors (the muscles that let you bring your knees toward your chest). Most importantly, because your pelvis is disconnected both from your legs and back, you've lost the movement and support of your legs (think again of the big muscle vs. little muscle idea).

To use a common example of working at a computer, what that means is that when you hold your hands out in front of you your hands have no support from your legs (base) and they get heavy and generate strain.

This leads me to another point, which I alluded to earlier…

It’s not just the chair, but a Sitting Disorder

Most people spend too much time sitting and/or in flexion (that's a position in which some part or all of your body is bent forward and/or your legs are bent forward at the hip). People sit too much. We get up from bed, get a shower, get dressed and then sit down to breakfast. Then we go outside, sit down in the car and drive to work. We get out of the car, walk into work and sit down at our desks - and sometimes don't move from there all day. Then we get up, go out to the car, sit down and drive home. Once home, we go inside, and sit down to dinner. Then we get up, do the dishes and then go sit down again and watch TV.

Perhaps this is a gross oversimplification, but you see the point. Sitting in and of itself is not a bad thing, but sitting for long periods everyday - without neutralizing the tension that accumulates by doing it - is very hard on the body. If you have one, remember what your cat or dog does every time it gets up.

As I’ve mentioned before, the body is very compliant; it does its best to do what we ask of it. If you have to lift a lot of weight every day, it grows more muscle, tendon and ligament in order to lift the weight more easily. If you run a lot, it leans up, increases its ability to absorb and process oxygen from the atmosphere and uses it to break down lactic acid so that it can run farther faster. If you sit for long periods of time, it starts to form itself to that position, like it has been asked.

Humans are not built to have our legs at right angles to our pelvis for long periods of time; through the process of evolution our legs lengthened out, our pelvis changed shape, our hip joints opened and lengthened in front and we were able to stand on two feet.

It's not that you shouldn't sit down. It’s just that you need to take action in order to counteract the effects of long-term sitting; especially so you can continue doing the things you love to do (that quality of life I talked about earlier). If you don't neutralize the tension you accumulate when sitting, your body will begin to look like you’re still sitting when you’re standing; your range of motion will steadily decrease, your body will begin to clog up and you will begin to feel old.

Said another way: people don't get old and then stop moving - they stop moving and then they get old.

There are certain things that will happen no matter what you do, but having worked with people from the ages of 5 minutes to 86 years, “old” is something that for the most part you do to yourself.

The results we’re creating - and want to change
or
Compound Interest – Use it or be used by it

A person once asked Einstein what the most powerful force in the universe was. He thought for a moment and then said, "Compound interest."

This applies to you in how your body is adapting to the mini-insults we discussed earlier. When you are walking around with one leg shorter than the other, you are, in effect, spending on credit with your body and paying interest on it every day. You are accumulating stress with every step (or every hour of sitting that you don’t neutralize) – borrowing from the natural suppleness of your body, and one day the bank is going to call the loan due in the form of reduced flexibility, general stiffness and ultimately back pain. On the other hand, if you follow the program that is laid out here and do the exercises regularly, you will be paying a small amount into an account everyday and collecting interest on it everyday (compound interest), which as we all know, over a long time creates a great deal.

Which way would you prefer to take that idea? I know which one I’d choose.

So to summarize, asymmetry is wonderful and useful...in its natural state of small amounts. It flows and has a bounce to it. Not so great is an imposed, unnatural, held asymmetry which will continue to degrade into diminishing function and pain. It goes, "Thud!" when you look at it. Look around and you’ll see it everywhere. Every now and then, you see people who just seem to float along, perhaps not really seeming to touch the ground - maybe it looks as if they have wheels on. They just glide, but there's something syncopated about their rhythm. That's natural asymmetry.

Water and your Back Pain

Learning about the way your body works bio-mechanically is very important, but there is another aspect to the equation that will help solve your back pain. That aspect is water. Now, I'm not a physiologist or nutritionist, I'm speaking from experience and education. Water is powerfully effective in increasing the flexibility and fluidity in our joints - and it's free.

The studies about how much you should drink, or not, are plentiful and (thanks to the internet) very easy to find. It's not my place in this book to provide an analysis of these for you. However, it will help you to understand the goal of this program if you can see the part that water plays in your body.

Your body is, depending on whom you talk to, between 70 and 80% water. It uses water as a medium to do almost everything: all the chemicals in your body are dissolved in water, your blood is mostly water...in fact, your brain is mostly water! The important thing for you to understand here, though, is that your body uses water for the construction, lubrication and "padding" of your joints. Cartilage is mostly water and the fluid in your joints is mostly water. Most importantly, for the purposes of our discussion, your spinal discs are upwards of 75% water. The discs themselves basically resemble a jelly doughnut. These discs, along with your abdominal wall, support the weight of the upper body with most of the load being supported by the gel part of the disc.

When the spinal discs shrink through dehydration, poor use and/or trauma, their user is embarking on one of the most miserable experiences possible. Without fully hydrated spinal discs, the spine cannot perform its function properly. You are then said to have "back problems." As the physical and nervous pressures increase, the connective tissue matrix that surrounds the spine goes to high alert and tries to lock everything down to prevent further problems. Remember how we talked about bracing earlier in the book - this is another example. This time the bracing is as a result of dehydration. The result of this is that the vertebrae become misplaced, the pressure on the spinal discs continues

and in response, your body ratchets up the compression - it’s a vicious cycle.

You may have seen x-rays of your spine and been told that the spaces in between the bones have narrowed. This is usually told to you in a tone that indicates that you're heading down the slippery slope towards the trash heap and that there's nothing really you can do. This narrowing can create a host of problems including pinched nerves, muscle spasms, reduction of range of motion and, of course, pain. I've found that this condition is largely due to three things: misalignment of the body (due mostly to ingrained poor movement patterns), muscular imbalance and lack of water.

The important piece here to understand is that the body needs a regular supply of water to keep these disc spaces supplied and muscles properly lubricated. Just as importantly, it also needs the movements in your spine that create a vacuum to draw the water into them. If you are suffering from long-term dehydration, it is almost sure that this is one of the major problems underlying your back pain.

We all know the importance of making sure pregnant women are well fed. The developing baby needs certain nutrients to grow properly and if the mother doesn't eat them, the baby will take them from the stores in the mother's body. This includes taking calcium from the mother's bones and water from her body for its amniotic fluid. When my wife was pregnant, our doctor advised her to drink lots of water every day saying, "Your body refreshes the baby's amniotic fluid almost every day. It needs new water to do this. You wouldn't want your baby swimming in a stagnant pool, would you?"

Good advice. Think the same thought about your joints! If your body's cells don't get the water they need to maintain their function, they take it from other less crucial (as if there is such a thing) areas. Over the long term, this spells problems for your joints.

Good News Just In:

The good news is that through replenishing your water supply (drinking enough water every day) and the exercises that follow, you'll be aiding

the body's mechanisms for replenishing the water it needs to cushion your joints and re-make your spine.

Yes, that's right; I said re-make your spine. The human body is amazingly plastic and has an amazing capacity to regenerate itself. I've been witness to more than a few doctors scratching their heads at the positive difference in a patient's spine after a few months of water and proper exercise. Proper hydration and regular exercise will help to restore the resilience and function of your spine.

So how much is enough? I'm going to give you what I do and let you decide for yourself about how much is right for you. Here's the formula I use. For those of you who use the metric system, you want to drink about 3 centiliters for every kilo of body weight. For those of you that measure your weight in pounds, drink one ounce of water for every two pounds of body weight. Those 1 1/2 liter bottles of water that you get at the store are about 50 ounces, so do your measurements accordingly.

Using myself as an example: I'm just less than 100 kilos, or about 220 pounds. I need to drink a bit more than 300 centiliters or about 100 ounces of water a day. That's two of those 1 1/2 liter bottles.

Do I do that every day? No - but consistency pays; some days it's more, some days it's less. When I learned about the amount of water my body needed, I got a great piece of advice: don't try and do it all in one day. Start with a couple of glasses and then add a glass or two every week until you reach the desired amount. Just like training for a marathon - don't go out and run the full 26 miles on the first day. Start easy and move up slowly.

The other important thing to remember when working towards proper hydration is to make sure you're getting enough salts in your system. For most of us, this isn't a problem, in that most foods have more than enough salt in them to compensate for the additional water intake without an imbalance of sodium levels. For myself, because I don't eat out a lot and try to keep the amount of processed foods I eat down to a minimum, I use small amounts of unrefined sea salt with my cooking and this does the trick just fine. I like the unrefined sea salt (it's grey looking) because it has trace amounts of all kinds of good minerals as well.

But what about the fruit juice/tea/coffee/soda (diet or otherwise)/ power drinks/wine, etc. that I drink all day, you ask? You do receive some benefit from drinking these things, but nothing beats pure water. Even more importantly, your body needs water to process the sugar and chemicals that are in a lot of these things.

Drink what you like, but make sure you get your water every day. I've seen many bits of math that make this drink a fraction of a cup or that drink this fraction of a cup, but that just makes it more work. After living in France for 6 years I had to develop a solution that would blend with my lifestyle. My solution is to have a glass of water after every glass of wine or Cognac. Very simple.

All this might seem a little tedious at first, but you will notice the results when you're properly hydrated. Your vision gets clearer, you mood improves, things that normally bother you just seem to slide on by, your thinking gets easier, your memory improves...the list is quite long. In my house, whenever I'm grumpy, one of my girls will usually bring me a glass of water. Aside from just the sheer cuteness of the gesture, my mood improves immediately when I drink water.

The Program

How much is being free of back pain worth to you? If you can move with ease, do the activities and tasks that are both necessary and desired an hour a day? an hour a week? It's up to you how much you think you're worth here. The good news is that the program I have developed doesn't take more than 30 minutes per day - in two 15 minute installments and for some people just 15 minutes. That's barely anything when we consider how much time we spend watching television, surfing the net, etc....

All the above information is important to remember, but the most important thing is to do the program outlined below on a regular basis. For my clients who have pain on a daily basis, I instruct them to do this program 2 times per day. For pain on a weekly basis, 1 time per day. Continue doing the program at the recommended frequency and you'll feel the shift very quickly. The reports I get are that the pain just "went away."

Pay attention, though. When the pain disappears, it's very important to continue doing the program, albeit at a reduced frequency. The problem is still there and will be addressed by the program as you continue; it's just that the critical warning sign - pain - is not present.

For myself, I do the program 3-5 per week and/or after my workouts. After nearly 30 years of martial arts training, I need it. It keeps my body happy and I want to keep training until I expire.

Now let's get on to the exercises - and I use this word loosely, because they will bring so much pleasure to your life that the word ‘exercises’, which connotes work and drudgery, doesn't fit. All the "exercises" that follow have been modified and distilled to their essence and tested in over 5,000 hours of clinical experience to be the most effective possible. Run through each of these exercises a few times to become familiar with them, then we’ll add the all important “magical” ingredients to make this work for your body, for lasting change.

There are two variations included: a beginner’s version and an advanced version - on some of the exercises. This is because some people are more flexible than others, and some can't do the full version first thing out of the gate.

Important to note: DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DO SOMETHING THAT HURTS... or PUSH YOURSELF too much.

<u>An Important Note About Stretches</u>

Your body is neurologically programmed to retract from pain. Remember the last time you touched something really hot? Your hand snapped back away from it - THEN you felt the pain. In the same way, if you push your stretches so that you feel pain when you do them, your body will be trying to get away from the pain while you’re doing it. Think of trying to drive to a destination with one foot firmly planted on the gas and the other firmly planted on the brake. Not a good thing.

In doing these exercises, ease into them. This is not an instant fix. It is quick, but not instant. Slowly move into each stretch, finding the point at which you feel stretch, but no pain. You should be able to stay in each

position for 30 seconds to 1 minute - so make sure that you're comfortable.

One final note: In doing these exercises, form is everything. If you attempt to get what looks like more stretch by cheating on your form, the only person you're cheating is yourself. Give yourself permission to learn and get comfortable with these exercises over a couple of weeks. Flexibility takes time. I've done my very best in the videos to demonstrate good form - follow my example; it's not necessary to fold yourself in half to experience the benefits.

If you can, put these stretches on your iPod or iPhone, so you have them right in front of you while you do them. And, if you have a full-length mirror in your home, do them in front of the mirror for a while, so you can see your form. **If you're not sure that you're doing them right - send me a picture or video of you doing them and I'll give you some pointers.**

<u>The Sumo</u>

Beginners' version:

Find a chair that doesn't have wheels and get a small pillow or a folded up towel. Place the towel on the back of the seat of the chair so that when you sit in it, the towel is just underneath your bottom - NOT your thighs.

Bring yourself and the towel to the edge of the chair. Place your feet, just slightly (less than 15 degrees) turned out, about twice your shoulder width apart in front of you.

Sit up nice and tall and place your hands on your knees with the thumbs on the inside and your elbows straight. Keep your elbows straight and let all the weight of your body rest on your hands. As your upper body rests into gravity, your hands will naturally push your knees out to the side. Assist gravity just a little and push your knees outward. Try and keep your back as long as possible. You will feel your inner thigh muscles tugging and as you relax into it by breathing deeply into your diaphragm

it will actually feel really good. Remember not to force it, just let gravity and your breath do the work for you. When you're ready, bring yourself back up to sitting and bring your knees together.

Advanced version:

From a standing position, spread your legs so that your feet are about twice as wide as your shoulders. Let your feet turn out just slightly (no more than 15 degrees) and keeping your back straight, bend at the hips and knees and lean forward so that you can place your hands on your knees with your thumbs on the inside. Keep your elbows straight and let all the weight of your body rest on your hands. As your upper body rests into gravity, your hands will naturally push your knees out to the side. This is the crucial move - let gravity push your knees outward. Try and keep your back as parallel with the ground as possible (i.e. - keep your bottom up), because if you "sit" it will actually make the stretch less effective.

You will begin to feel a stretching sensation at the top of your inner thigh muscles (commonly known as the groin muscles). This is exactly right. Now, ease up a little so that the stretching sensation doesn't become a painful one. As previously stated, this is counter-productive, so keep your stretch at the level at which you have no pain, just a stretching sensation. Stretching does NOT have to hurt to be effective!! As you settle into the stretch and breathe deeply, you will feel the muscle let go slightly with every out-breath. Continue for 30-40 seconds. You can also very gently let yourself move slightly from side to side - in effect 'sitting' into each hip joint alternately.

Gluteal Rotator Stretch

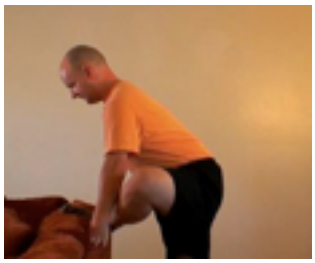
Some of you may have seen this stretch before done in other ways – various schools of yoga may call it the Pigeon – but these are the most effective ways I've found to do it.

Beginner's version:

In that same chair that doesn't have wheels, replace that small pillow or folded up towel at the back of the seat of the chair so that when you sit in it, the towel is just underneath your bottom - NOT your thighs.

Bring your left ankle up and cross it onto your right knee. Keeping your back straight and your neck long, pivot forward on your hip joints and, grasping the underside of your knee and ankle with your hands (to support them), let your body lean forward until you feel the stretch in your bottom or outside of your hip. Hold the stretch gently, breathing slowly and deeply into your belly until you feel the area expanding and contracting with your breath. Let yourself lean into the stretch just a little more, but not past the point of pain. Then, when you feel done, bring yourself back up to sitting and change legs.

Advanced version:



Stand next to a table or the back of a couch that is approximately the same height as your hip joints. A little lower won't make too much difference, but higher will be more challenging. If the surface is hard, you may want to put a towel or a flat pillow on the table as a bit of padding. Stand on one leg (the supporting leg) and bring the other up (the stretching leg) so that it is bent at the knee and the bottom of your foot points to the other side of your body. Position your stretching leg on the table so that your foot/ankle is lined up with your belly button

and the foot is about two hand-widths from your pelvis. Now, keeping your back straight ('cause it's easy to cheat on this one), keep your supporting leg slightly bent at the knee and bend forward at the hip joint gently. You'll feel the stretch almost immediately (if you haven't already) in your tush on the leg that's one the table. Some of you out there will be quite flexible and able to go forward quite a bit. No worries, just keep going forward until you feel the stretch and halt your forward movement before you hit the pain threshold. If you're like most people, just putting your leg in this position will create a pretty good stretch in your tush.

If you want the stretch closer in to your sacrum, bring your foot closer to your body. If you want it out at the point of your hip or on the outside of your leg, take the leg farther out away from your body. Remember to be gentle with yourself and ease into it, breathing deeply and slowly, allowing the muscle to let go with every out-breath.

Hamstring Press-ups

People hate to stretch their hamstrings and for the life of me I can't understand why. If it's done properly, it's one of the most sublime feelings ever. Here's how I've coached hundreds of people to do it.

Beginner's version:

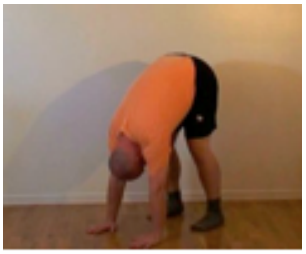
Stand in front of a stool or your couch, facing the front of it. Put your feet about hip width apart. Bend your knees and let yourself fold over toward the ground. Let your knees bend enough so that you can put your hands (or maybe just your fingers, depending on your level of flexibility) on the seat of the stool. Let your weight rest on your hands/fingers - this is very important. Now let your head drop so that you can feel it sway a little and very gently push your hips up toward the ceiling. Remember to let your weight rest on your hands as this lets your hamstrings relax even more, as they're not obliged to keep you from toppling over forward. Breathe gently in and out, letting your head drop toward the floor as you gently push your hips up toward the ceiling. Don't worry about not

touching the floor - wherever you start is good - it’s just more important to start.

You will probably feel the stretch immediately. Keep your hands on the chair as you gently transfer your weight slightly from one side to another. When you have most of your weight on one leg, push up a little more on that leg to really get that hamstring lengthened. Move slowly enough that you can feel the hamstring let go slightly with the out-breath.

When you're ready to come back up to standing, flex your knees more, bring your head up and then come back up to standing.

Advanced version:



Put your feet about hip width apart. Bend your knees and let yourself fold over toward the ground. Let your knees bend enough so that you can put your hands (or maybe just your fingers) on the floor. Let your weight rest on your hands/fingers - this is very important. Now let your head drop so that you can feel it sway a little and very gently push your hips up toward the ceiling. Remember to let your weight rest on your hands as this lets your hamstrings relax even more, as they're not obliged to keep you from toppling over forward

Breathe gently in and out, letting your head drop toward the floor as you gently push your hips up toward the ceiling. Don’t worry if you can’t get your legs to straighten out - wherever you are is good - flexibility comes with time.

Keep your hands on the floor as you gently transfer your weight slightly from one side to another. When you have most of your weight on one leg, push up a little more on that leg to really get that hamstring lengthened. Move slowly enough that you can feel the hamstring let go slightly with the out-breath.

When you're ready to come back up to stand, flex your knees more, bring your head up and then come back up to standing.

One Knee Hip Flexors

Most people try and do this stretch by standing on one leg, catching the ankle on their other leg, bending it at the knee and pulling it up behind them. That almost works, but you'll be missing out on what really makes the stretch rock, which is being able to stabilize your pelvis so that you can both get the right set of muscles stretched, elongating the front of the hip and creating more space in your spine.

Stand next to a wall a chair or a table - basically something that you can use to help stabilize yourself. Put a small pillow on the floor (or a folded towel) as some padding for your knee. Place one knee and the ball of that same foot on the floor and the other leg in front of you with its knee at slightly more than a 90 degree bend. Let your spine be nice and tall. Roll your pelvis backward (helps to contract your lower abs) so that you feel like you're pushing your low-back backwards and tucking your bottom underneath you. You might even at this point start to feel a stretch in the front of the thigh of the leg that's resting on the floor. Now gently push your pelvis forward by transferring your weight to the front leg and keeping your body upright.

Make sure you keep your pelvis in the same position, as you will have the tendency to let it slip and the stretch will be lost. You'll feel a stretching pull from about just above your hip bone in front to about mid-thigh. Once again, stretch to just the before the point of pain and relax into the stretch, breathing deeply and allowing the muscles to relax on the out-breath. For a little extra fun, you can lift up your upper body and gently extend your spine while you're in this position. Hold for 30-40 seconds or until you feel the muscles let go.

Phase Two:

These next two exercises are for when the first four are feeling more comfortable - perhaps a couple weeks after you start the program

The Sumo Spiral

Now that you've become accustomed to the Sumo and can do it standing, let's modify it slightly to move up into your back more. Keeping the position you were in before, let one shoulder drop down toward the floor while letting the other drift upward toward the ceiling. Notice I used the word 'let', not 'force'. As you do this movement, try and keep your head in the same position in space, so that you are turning around your spine, not moving your head from side to side. As you do this, you'll feel the stretch move more central in your groin and up into the side of your back that is turning toward the floor.

To move this stretch a little higher with ease, shift your weight slightly over to the down-turned side and use the resulting push-back from your leg to turn yourself a little more. Remember to let yourself ease into this stretch and take a good 30-40 seconds for each side.

Wall Walking

Since most people spend the vast majority of their lives in some sort of flexion (bent over forward, to some degree - eg, sitting, driving, watching TV, etc.), this is one of the best antidotes to extended flexion that I've found. Wall walking exercises the core musculature while letting the back move through its range of extension, and the benefits are far beyond what you'll get from simple back extensions. To paraphrase one of my favorite comedy routines (and date myself a little): listen to me know and hear me later - this exercise rocks.

Stand with your back to the wall and measure out 3 foot-lengths from the wall. Set your feet shoulder's width apart at this distance. Start by trying to suck your belly button into your spine – this will activate your abs to help you with this exercise.

Bend your knees slightly, bring your arms up and over your head and let your head fall back so that you can place your hands on the wall (fingers down). The object of the exercise is to "walk" your hands down the wall as far as you comfortably can, and then walk them back up again so that you rest at standing. You will feel both your abs shudder and a stretch in your spine as you work this exercise. Start with one repetition and see if you can work up to 10-15 in a few weeks time. You'll be absolutely amazed at the difference in your abdominal tone and the freedom you feel in your spine.

Don't stop reading now - This is the most important part!

The Critical Difference

Here's the bottom line: all the stretching and exercises that you've done have always been the same on both sides and in a sequence that may or may not work for you individually. That's why you're having the problems you're having - you've been reinforcing your body working in a way that is diametrically opposed to its true function.

Now that you're familiar with the exercises, here are the two things that are going to make them sing:

Asymmetrical Work and the Sequence in which you do it.

1. **Asymmetry**. You need to work with the Asymmetry of your body to produce maximum results.

Respecting the body's asymmetry will allow you to rebalance your body so quickly you'll be amazed. It gets to the core of your body's imbalances, changing the underlying pattern. I've seen this hundreds, if not thousands of times, even from people who are really supple: they have been doing their routines symmetrically and nothing is changing. Adding the idea and practice of asymmetry produces miraculous results in a very short period of time.

To work your muscles asymmetrically you need to work most tight to least tight in two ways.

a. You work with the tight and then less tight of the same muscle group - for example, my hip flexors are always tighter on the left so I do this one first, then again after I've stretched the right side.

b. You must stretch the tighter side MORE than the looser side. An easy formula that I've come up with is "Tight-Loose-Tight". Stretch the tighter side first, then the looser side, then the tighter side again.

Example: You're doing your hip-flexor stretches. You're down on your left knee and have noticed that it pulls more and you don't have as much range of motion on this side as you do on your right. The key move here is, when you do this stretch, start with your left side, then do your right side, then come back to your left and do it again. In this way you'll get an improvement in your flexibility and your range of motion very quickly.

2. **Sequence**. Your sequence - the order in which you do your stretches - is the other crucial thing you must pay attention to in order to correct any underlying problem.

In general, you will get your best results if you stretch muscles from the center outward, as more central muscles tend to have a greater impact on structure and function.

The stretches in this program, however, are ALL for deep, central muscle groups. We have to do some testing to find out exactly what sequence to work them in. This is where you have to experiment a little to find out which to start with.

Here's what you do: run through all these stretches and note which ones are the most challenging. Order them from most "tight" to least. Most people at this point will opt for the stretches that are "easy." This is a big mistake, as taking this path will produce feeble results. If, however, you **gently** do the most difficult stretch first and continue down the list to the last, and then do the tighter ones again, you will make gains incredibly fast.

If you have questions on this - visit my blog at www.bodygeometry.net. You'll find LOTS of goodies on this and many other things, and if you drop me an email detailing what your challenge is, I'll be happy to help.

Remember my 80 year old French farmer's wife. It's not important how FAR you can stretch these muscles. The goal is not to become a Gumby, the goal is to change the way your body cooperates with itself. The pattern in your body has been created by the way you use your body. If you continue to use it this way, you will continue to get the same results. It is only if you change the way you use it that you will get different results.

Start slow and easy and let your muscles expand and contract with your breathing. There should be no pain when you stretch – just the sensation of stretching. If there is pain, you're actually working against yourself. Go easy and work with your body – your results will surprise you.

Really settle into the stretch and let your breathing dictate where you are in it. Some days it will be much easier, sometimes a little less easy. After each stretch, give yourself a moment to relax and then go to the next one. The whole sequence will take you 10 minutes, 15 minutes at the most if you really take your time.

Within each stretch one side will be tighter than the other. Once again, stretch the side that's tighter first and last. Take your time with the stretch - it doesn't matter that the tight side doesn't go as far as the other. Concentrate on doing the exercises as I've shown in the video clips and keep and eye on your form. Good form will pay huge dividends; bad form will cost you in the long run.

Phase 3: It's getting easier. Now what? Antagonist Pairs

After a few weeks, you will start to notice that the exercises are getting easier. This is the point when we'll start pairing the sequences to get the best out of the routine. You'll see here that we're doing opposing motions in each pairing. Here are the antagonist pair groupings:

Sumo - Gluteal Rotators

Hamstrings - One Knee Hip Flexors

Wall Walking – Sumo Spiral

Final Notes:

You'll want to pay attention to **your** body's own asymmetry when doing these exercises. I've laid them out in a sequence in this book and in the videos - which most likely will not be the sequence that works best for you. Pay attention to what your body is telling you about which side is tighter in each stretch and which group is tighter when you start pairing them. Respecting your body's own sequence will pay you far more benefit than just following mine.

Remember the principle that I discussed earlier: you must stretch muscles on opposing sides of the joint or body in order to make gains in your range of motion and flexibility. This sequence has been proven with hundreds and hundreds of people over many, many years.

Keep with it, remember not to force it, and you'll experience the miraculous results in a very short time, too.