

TRAINING AROUND BACK PAIN



Ryan is a former professional squash player, having competed on the PSA World Tour for 12 years, where he reached a high of seventh in the world rankings. He is the lead physiotherapist and medical coordinator for the PSA

In part four of this new series, Derek Ryan, a chartered physiotherapist, looks at training around back pain

Lower back pain (LBP) is a common problem among many people who play sport. Squash requires plenty of rotational movements and bending that can sometimes over-stress the body and lead to LBP. However, many research articles suggest a sedentary lifestyle also leads to a greater chance of developing LBP!

So, what can we do if we develop LBP? It is important to recognise what is the main aggravating factor causing the pain. In order to break the cycle of pain, start by removing those aggravating factors until the pain is manageable. Peter O'Sullivan, a physiotherapist from Australia, has been involved in a lot of research into LBP and reports a fear of pain and injury can sometimes be more debilitating than pain itself.

With that in mind, it is so important to keep moving and activating the muscles in our body. The main risk factors associated with LBP in sport are a lack of strength and conditioning, and a lack of mobility in the hips. There is a strong suggestion that if you improve your strength and conditioning, and have a good mobility programme, you can help reduce the risk of injury in the first place.

The exercises below are a good starting place if you have LBP. It is important to perform the exercises relatively pain-free. Slight discomfort is acceptable, but if you are experiencing moderate to severe pain, it is advisable to seek out help from a physiotherapist or another health-care provider.

THE EXERCISES

CIRCUIT – repeat three times

1. Cat camel x 6
2. Superman x 6
3. Bridge x 8
4. Standing hip march x 10 (hold for 2 seconds)
5. Psoas stretch (x 4 breaths each side)
6. Quad stretch (x 4 breaths each side)

THE ROUTINE

Complete the circuit three times.

CIRCUIT – repeat three times

1. CAT CAMEL X 6

Start on all fours with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. To perform the cat camel, slowly inhale and gradually arch your lower back while looking straight ahead. Pause for one second and then slowly round your back and tuck your chin into your chest.



2. SUPERMAN X 6

Start on all fours with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Keep your lower back straight, lightly tighten your stomach muscles and then lift your right arm out in front and the opposite leg straight out behind you. Hold this position for five seconds (keep breathing) and lower the arm and leg back down. Repeat on the opposite side.



3. BRIDGE X 8

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet shoulder-width apart, and your arms by your side. Slowly lift your tail bone slightly off the floor. Push your heels into the floor while squeezing and lifting your buttocks into the air. Hold for one second and lower your back down to the floor.



4. STANDING HIP MARCH X 10

Stand straight (avoid over-arching your lower back) next to a wall. Lift one knee up, hold for two seconds and squeeze the buttock on the standing leg. Lower the leg and repeat on the other side.



5. PSOAS STRETCH X 4 BREATHS

Kneel on one knee (on a cushion or towel), creating a 90° angle with the opposite hip. Try to avoid over-arching your lower back. Tighten the glute on the side you are kneeling on. Transfer your weight forward until you feel a comfortable stretch on the front of your thigh. Hold for four deep breaths and repeat on the opposite side.



6. QUAD STRETCH X 4 BREATHS

Lie on your side and grab the top ankle with one hand and pull your foot towards your buttocks until you feel a comfortable stretch (avoid stretching as hard as you can) on the thigh of the elevated leg. Hold the stretch for four deep breaths and then repeat on the other side.

