



## The 4 Main Causes of Low-back Pain (and what you can do to help)

Written by Joelle Solomon – May 19, 2022

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Throughout my career working closely with people and their bodies as a personal trainer and massage therapist, I've learned that one of the most common place people experience pain is the low back and one of the biggest misconceptions people have when it comes to lower back pain is that it is caused solely by lower back tightness.

This can be true however, once the lower back is tight, it is usually indicative of another problem that has been going on for a while. In other words, lower back tightness is generally a *symptom*, not a *cause*.

Below I'll share with you the most common causes of lower back pain and what you can do to help.

### 1. Weak Core

This does not mean a chiselled six-pack. In fact, a strong core has nothing to do with how lean a person is or how defined their stomach is. The core is a very intricate, deep internal muscular structure that helps our spine, organs, muscles and joints stay healthy, strong and stable.

When the core is weak, our spine lacks the necessary support and begins compressing on itself, our posture begins declining, and we begin losing stability. The surrounding joints and muscles start to "pick up the slack" for what the core isn't doing. The most common places that will start to compensate are our lower back muscles, our lower vertebrae, or our sacro-iliac joints (at the base of the spine/top of the hips). We will begin to feel symptoms like lower back tightness, sciatic pain, hip pain, or nerve pain.

So in this case, deep stretching of the low-back might help for a few hours or days but ultimately it is just covering up the underlying cause of weakness in the core. There are a few simple practices that you can begin incorporating into your days to strengthen your core such as planks, balancing practices (walking on bumpy terrain, doing upper body movements while standing on one leg, standing on a Bosu ball, etc.), dancing, and many other core exercises. See my next blog *An Introduction to a Strong Core for Beginners*.

## 2. Lack of Mobility

There is a difference between movement and mobility. Some of the most active people still lack mobility. An example is someone who does a lot of weight lifting, maybe 3-5 days per week. This person would be considered someone who is active and incorporates movement into their lives. However, if we look at the TYPE of movement they are doing, weightlifting, it is a movement that is quite rigid, moving from point A to point B with a structured form. This person might even have a strong core that they use to deadlift or squat heavy weight.

While this can be great, our joints and our muscles are not meant to always move in stiff, robotic ways. Our bodies NEED fluid movement AKA mobility. This is also not the same thing as doing static stretching (another structured movement).

Fluid movement would look like doing hip circles, spinal rolls, twisting from side to side while letting your arms hang, etc. It is more about moving in a way that *feels good* rather than with perfect technique. This will help bring mobility back into your spine and your hips which will bring oxygen, synovial fluid (lubricant for your joints) and other vital nutrients to your low back.

## 3. Stress

Our emotional states and our bodies are interwoven with each other. Our physical state effects our emotional state and vice versa. A lot of people have resistance to this idea because it can seem abstract. The question I ask people is if they have ever found themselves with a tight and painful jaw or a headache after going through a heightened period of stress? Most people can answer yes.

The lower back is no different and everyone holds tension in different parts of their bodies depending on many different factors. The low back is one of the more common areas that will show up when someone is feeling heightened or prolonged periods of stress.



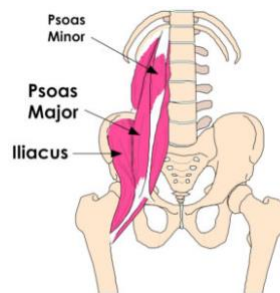
When this is the case, typically what is needed is to identify the stressors (external or internal), slow down enough to listen to your body, rest and take care of yourself. Find ways of slowing down that feel the most nourishing for you. Some of my favourite ways to do this are yin yoga, getting a massage,

journaling, napping, slow walks, reading a book, talking to someone I trust, etc. Most people are surprised at the amount of aches and pains that simply vanish after some down time.

#### 4. Tight Hip Flexors

Sometimes tightness is the cause for lower back pain but most often it is actually the hip flexors that are tight and not the actual lower back muscles. The hip flexors are a set of 3 large muscles that attach from the front of the spine and pelvic bones onto the front of the femur (thigh bone).

The action of the hip flexors is to pull the thigh and torso towards each other. It's an extremely powerful muscle. But they also can become tight due to prolonged sitting, poor posture, weak glutes, etc. When these muscles are tight, they may start to pull at the front of the spine which will lead to pain in the lower back.



The easiest way to begin to relieve this pain is a combination of deep stretching in the hip flexors combined with strengthening the glutes. Performing deep hip flexor stretches (holding them for at least 90 seconds) combine with some simple glute strengthening exercises will help correct this imbalance.

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Lower back pain does not need to be a lifelong problem and can be improved with the right knowledge and commitment. This by no means covers all of the possibilities causing low back pain but these are 4 of the most common causes that I encounter. These are not quick fixes and they require developing a relationship with your body to understand what it might need. It's about finding a balance in a way that works for you and your lower back.

*Joelle Solomon*

PS – These recommendations should not be considered medical advice. I encourage you to talk to your doctor or other health care professional so you can care for your body in a way that works best for you!

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