

low back pain

Description

Gentle Reader,

Yicks! **Low back pain**. Leg numbness. JR, my twenty something trainer, moved me up to a new set of exercises last week. I'm not the only ancient mariner at the Xgym by a long shot, but the way they schedule us in half hour slots for a 25 minute hands-on workout, I don't have the opportunity to see how the other over-70 year olds are doing. What I do know is the numbness in my right leg showed up on Sunday morning while I was navigating between the choir corner and my chair in the Ensemble (a little pick up band that plays the family service at our Episcopal Cathedral here in Seattle.) And my lower back was killing me.

When you have low back pain because of a workout, do you quit? No. You modify the workout to avoid low back pain.

On Monday, I talked to PJ, the owner and creator of Xgym, who is also a physical therapist. He knew right away what to do to modify my program and to help me avoid **low back pain** between the twice a week sessions. Squats free standing on uneven surfaces using ski poles to support stability strained my back too much.



Picture ski poles
and squats on an
uneven surface
like this pillow

He changed this quad exercise to leg raises on one of the machines, hands forward so the

lower back is relatively uninvolved.



lean forward
draping your
arms over the
top cushions to
reduce back
strain.

This round of exercises to strengthen the shoulders and lats meant lifting weights while standing, arms outstretched on either side, ratcheting up two, down one, up two, down one seven times and then back down.



Turn around with the back against the upright frame to prevent low back strain

This action aggravated the lower back. PJ changed the move so I stand against a flat surface stabilizing my back and shoulders while I do the same straight arm lifting.

I tell you this because it illustrates the importance of hands-on training when your body has areas of weakness from previous injuries, arthritis, or some other cause. Friends I have talked to about my Xgym workouts shy away because they are afraid of hurting themselves. “I can’t take all that jumping around,” they tell me. There is no jumping around. “X” doesn’t mean extreme, insane, sweat pouring activity. In fact, there is almost no stress on joints at all. These exercises are designed to bring each of five muscle groups to complete fatigue through slow, controlled movements.

The second corrective advice PJ gave was to suggest daily warm up exercises including “cat-cow” and opposite leg and arm extensions from the neutral “cat-cow” stance. Good old Pilates exercises I have forgotten about. He explained that when the back is stressed, it seizes up, guarding against further pain. Doing the “cat-cow” reassures the lower back that it is safe to move. Relax. Relax and go with the flow. This movement gets the blood flowing freely in the area, supported by the breath.



Cat-cow exercise



People go to the gym for all kinds of reasons: body-building, endurance, losing weight or at least making that extra piece of bacon inconsequential—calories in, calories out. I am there for one express purpose: preventing osteoporosis. The slow-burning activated muscles pull on the attached bone and the bone reacts by taking on more density.

Did you know that medical anthropologists [have determined](#) that the people with the strongest bones in the history of human kind were the slave-class women in ancient Egypt, as compared to women from the ranks of Egypt's elite? High ranking women were extremely inactive physically. Same ethnic stock, different life styles. Different bone density and strength.

PJ Glassey's [Xgym](#) has not cloned itself across the US. He has only two locations in the greater Seattle area, Harbor Dr. in West Seattle and downtown Kirkland on the eastside. I hope more trainers with extensive physical therapy knowledge develop this low stress, high intensity approach. Those of us working to avoid the deterioration of joints that comes with aging and keep a high level of fitness and strength need this type of training. You can read about his methods and the science behind them in his book [Cracking Your Calorie Code](#). I do not agree with PJ on the topic of supplementation. The kind of diet he consumes may be adequate for many *if you never miss a day* eating the way he recommends. As careful as I am about my food intake, there are days I cannot get all the nutrients I need from food. I am just not home to prepare those fresh vegetables three meals a day. Some bodies need more nutrients to build optimal health than they can get from good food alone. Read his book and decide for yourself. He has so many good pointers and if you don't live in Seattle, it's the next best thing.

Not all supplements are equal. They must be sourced from organic, non-genetically modified plants and they must be processed so no contaminants or impurities taint a single tablet. I trust the [Shaklee scientists](#) because my body lets me know how well they are absorbed. If I couldn't believe my body, I can believe the double-blind clinical trials with real people using these products in independent tests. If you feel your body is not getting everything it needs from food alone and you are already taking supplements, I invite you to change brands for a minimum of three months to see if the Shaklee effect happens to you. It takes three months for the blood to be all new. That length of time would be a fair trial.

By all means, keep moving. The breath carries the blood to the muscles and joints. Moving means breathing deeply, from the bottom of the belly. This action alone will do more for your health than any other single thing.

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Be well, Do well and Keep Moving,

Betsy

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