

A PROGRAM TO STRENGTHEN THE BACK AND SPINE  
by Thomas Smith

A 4-week program to strengthen the back and spine incorporating these exercises progressively. Remember to consult a healthcare professional before starting any new exercise program, especially if you have pre-existing conditions or injuries.

Week 1: Establishing Foundation

- Day 1:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 3 sets of 10 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 30 seconds, repeat 3 times
  - 30 seconds Plank
- Day 2: Core exercises
- Day 3:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 3 sets of 8 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 45 seconds, repeat 3 times
  - 1-minute Plank
- Day 4: Core exercises
- Day 5:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 3 sets of 12 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 45 seconds, repeat 3 times
  - 45 seconds Plank
- Day 6: Core exercises
- Day 7: Gentle stretching and rest

Week 2: Increasing Intensity

- Day 1:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 3 sets of 10 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 1 minute, repeat 3 times
  - 1-minute Plank
- Day 2: Core exercises
- Day 3:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 4 sets of 12 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 1 minute, repeat 3 times
  - 1.5-minute Plank
- Day 4: Core exercises
- Day 5:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 4 sets of 10 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 1.5 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 1.5-minute Plank
- Day 6: Core exercises
- Day 7: Gentle stretching and rest

Week 3: Adding Variety and Endurance

- Day 1:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 4 sets of 15 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 1.5 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 2-minute Plank

- Day 2: Core exercises
- Day 3:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 4 sets of 12 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 2 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 2.5-minute Plank
- Day 4: Core exercises
- Day 5:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 4 sets of 18 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 2 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 3-minute Plank
- Day 6: Core exercises
- Day 7: Gentle stretching and rest

#### Week 4: Building Strength and Stability

- Day 1:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 4 sets of 15 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 2.5 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 3-minute Plank
- Day 2: Core exercises
- Day 3:
  - Yoga Cat Cow Pose: 4 sets of 20 reps
  - Yoga Child's Pose: Widen the hips and hold for 2.5 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 3.5-minute Plank
- Day 4: Core exercises
- Day 5:
  - Yoga Upward Facing Dog: 4 sets of 18 reps
  - Yoga Downward Facing Dog: Hold for 3 minutes, repeat 3 times
  - 4-minute Plank
- Day 6: Core exercises
- Day 7: Gentle stretching and rest

Progressing gradually in repetitions and duration while ensuring proper form and alignment during these exercises can help strengthen your back and spine effectively over four weeks. Adjust intensity or take extra rest days if needed based on your comfort and body's response.

#### CORE EXERCISES:

Strengthening the abdominal muscles is a key aspect of core training. Here are some effective abdominal exercises for core days:

1. **Crunches:** Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place your hands behind your head or crossed over your chest. Lift your shoulder blades off the ground by contracting your abdominal muscles, then slowly lower back down without straining your neck.

2. **Leg Raises:** Lie on your back with legs extended. Keep your hands under your hips

or beside you for support. Lift your legs off the ground while keeping them straight until they are perpendicular to the floor, then slowly lower them back down without letting them touch the ground.

3. Russian Twists: Sit on the floor with knees bent, feet flat, and lean back slightly, keeping your back straight. Hold a weight or medicine ball in front of you with both hands. Twist your torso to the right, bringing the weight beside your right hip, then twist to the left, bringing the weight beside your left hip. Repeat this movement while engaging your core.

4. Bicycle Crunches: Lie on your back with hands behind your head, knees bent, and feet off the ground. Alternately bring your right elbow towards your left knee while extending your right leg straight, then switch to bring your left elbow towards your right knee in a pedaling motion.

#### STRETCHING TECHNIQUES:

Stretching the back and spine can help improve flexibility, reduce tension, and alleviate discomfort. Here are some stretching techniques for your rest days:

1. Seated Forward Fold: Sit on the floor with legs extended in front of you. Reach your arms overhead and then slowly hinge at your hips, bending forward and reaching towards your toes. Keep your back straight as you fold forward, feeling the stretch in your lower back and hamstrings.

2. Spinal Twist: Lie on your back and draw your knees towards your chest. Extend your arms out to the sides in a T-shape. Lower your knees to one side while keeping your shoulders grounded. Hold the stretch, then switch to the other side. This stretch releases tension in the spine and lower back.

3. Standing Forward Bend: Stand with feet hip-width apart, then fold forward from your hips, reaching towards the floor or grabbing your ankles/shins. Allow your upper body to hang loose. You can bend your knees slightly if needed. This stretch elongates the spine and stretches the entire back.

4. Cobra Stretch: Lie on your stomach with palms on the ground near your chest. Push through your hands to lift your chest off the ground while keeping your pelvis grounded. Keep your elbows slightly bent and arch your back gently. This stretch targets the muscles in the lower back and abdomen.

Remember to perform these stretches gently and gradually. Avoid forcing your body into uncomfortable positions and listen to your body's limits. If you have any existing back issues or injuries, it's advisable to consult with a healthcare professional or a physical therapist before starting any new stretching routine.