

Relieve Back Pain Using a Tennis Ball

Back pain is a common ailment affecting eight out of every 10 people. Though some sort of back pain is common, few will have conditions serious enough to require surgery. A massage helps reduce muscle tension and provide relief for lower back pain or sciatica. For those times when a massage isn't possible, tennis balls are a self-help substitute you can use almost anywhere.

Massage Therapy

The purpose of massage for back pain patients is to increase circulation, relax muscles to improve mobility and release endorphins as a natural pain management tool, according to Beth Mueller, RMT writing for the website Spine-Health. One or more tennis balls can simulate the pressure used by massage therapists. Though not as elaborate as a full massage, tennis ball therapy helps focus the pressure on specific areas where tension or knots exist.

Developing Therapy Programs

Before you start a tennis ball therapy program, talk to your doctor about your back or sciatica condition. Physical therapists do recommend the use of tennis balls but there may be restrictions imposed by your doctor. Patients should have enough mobility to lie down on the balls and get up. In cases where the sciatic nerve is pinched, refrain from placing tennis balls near the area of pain origin, to reduce the risk of further impingement and injury. Tennis ball therapy may be one component added to a physical therapy, medication or exercise program.

Using Tennis Balls

You can use one or more tennis balls depending on your pain tolerance and ability to balance. Tennis ball therapy simply works by your laying on the tennis ball or balls and allowing gravity to exert the pressure. Using one ball in an area where a specific knot or tension is will exert significant pressure on the area and can cause pain from the pressure. The pain from the tennis ball is equivalent to the pain you would feel when a masseuse works a tight knot. Using two or four balls equally on the right and left side spreads pressure over more balls and works more areas at once with less pain. Duct tape balls together to create a groove where the spine sits and works the muscles on both sides of the spine. Spend four to five minutes on each knot, simply laying there until the knot relaxes. While you can focus on just the lower back, it is wise to also release pressure in the middle and upper back. Work several areas for best results. Do pay attention to the difference types of pain; pain associated with your back condition can include sharp pains, pins and needles, dull aches or even numbness.

Pressure-Pain Threshold

You may have quite a bit of tension in your back. The more tension and direct pressure placed with the tennis ball, the more pain you might feel. Remember that the goal is **good pain** that allows the muscle to relax. If the pain is too intense, adjust the ball slightly or add more balls to release direct pressure. Too much pain will aggravate any knots and worsen the tightness in your back. Be sure to breathe while lying on the tennis balls and drink a lot of water to flush any toxins released from the muscles.

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Try... Low Back Loosener

Why It Helps: This move massages and relieves tension in the multiple back and core muscles that intersect in the lower back.

How to do it:

1. Place 2 balls on the lower part of your back, just above your hips. Slowly lie back onto the balls. They should be placed on either side of the spine not directly on the bone. Breathe deeply and evenly. If you don't feel anything, pull one or both knees into your chest. If you'd like, you can place the balls in a tote, stocking, or sock.

2. Move the balls up the back, resting at different spots to relieve pressure. Again, pull the knees into your chest to increase the intensity. As you move up the back, you may feel a bit more pressure.

3. Breathe deeply and stay relaxed as you move up the back.

Watch this YouTube video for more instruction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L3VLrdXWho>



Try... Upper Back UnWind

Why It Helps: This move is a postural corrective, an upper back tension reliever, and also helps to revive your breath.

How to do it:

1. Lie down and place two balls side by side on either side of your upper back. (You can place them in a tote, stocking, or sock, if you'd like.) Interlace your hands behind your head and lift your head off the floor, bringing your chin toward your chest. Lift your bottom off the floor and take 3 deep breaths into your ribs.

2. Keeping your breaths big and steady, roll the balls like a rolling pin up and down your upper back for 3 to 4 minutes.

If you are having severe back pain, I highly recommend you see your doctor. These exercises will help relieve tension in your muscles but will not elevate more serious problems.

More often than not, back pain, especially lower back pain, is caused by tight hamstrings or gluteus maxims (or buttocks) muscles. Incorporating a daily stretching routine is highly recommended.

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