

LOW BACK STRENGTH / 4-WEEK STARTER

Low back strength starter programme

A four-week plan for gradual-onset low back pain

A practical starting plan for active people and cricketers with gradual-onset low back pain. It focuses on staying active and rebuilding strength with simple movements you can adjust to your symptoms.

Who this plan may suit

This general plan is for adults whose low back pain developed gradually and is mainly around the lower back. It may suit common non-specific low back pain, but symptoms alone cannot confirm the cause.

Get assessed before starting if

Your pain followed a significant fall or collision; you have marked or worsening leg weakness or numbness; or you have a history of cancer, infection, recent surgery or a fracture risk. Adolescent fast bowlers with back pain during bowling should stop bowling and get assessed before returning.

The plan at a glance

CHECK	WHAT TO DO
Frequency	Two sessions in week 1; build to two or three a week if symptoms settle well.
Session	About 15–25 minutes. Leave at least one rest day between sessions.
Equipment	A floor mat, a wall and a light backpack or dumbbell for the later stage. Bodyweight is enough to start.

Use your response to guide the next step

CHECK	WHAT TO DO
Manageable	Some mild discomfort can be okay if you stay in control and symptoms settle near usual by the following morning.
Scale it back	If pain builds as you go, changes how you move, travels further down the leg or is clearly worse the next day, reduce range, resistance or sets.
Stop and get advice	Stop and seek an assessment for new weakness, numbness, pins and needles, or a feeling that your leg is giving way.

01 / WEEKS 1-2

Start with a manageable load

Begin with two sessions in the first week. If your back settles well by the following morning, build to two or three sessions a week. Keep comfortable daily activity going where you can.

EXERCISE	DOSE	HOW TO DO IT
Hip hinge to wall	2 sets 8-10 reps	Stand a short step in front of a wall, facing away. Soften your knees and push your hips back to tap the wall, then stand tall. Move through a comfortable range; your back does not need to stay rigid.
Glute bridge	2 sets 8-12 reps	Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Gently lift your hips until your trunk and thighs form a comfortable line, then lower slowly. Avoid pushing into a strong back arch.
Bird dog	2 sets 6 each side	On hands and knees, reach one arm and the opposite leg away. Keep the movement small enough to stay steady, pause for 3-5 seconds, then change sides. Shorten the reach if your back feels worse.

How hard should it feel?

Use a light-to-moderate effort. Finish each set feeling that you could do a few more controlled repetitions. Rest about 60-90 seconds between sets. It is fine to use a smaller range or pause an exercise if symptoms rise.

A simple session log

CHECK	WHAT TO DO
Date / session	_____ Back during exercise: _____
Next morning	About the same / better / clearly worse Change for next time: _____

02 / WEEKS 3-4

Build the challenge gradually

Move to this stage after around two weeks if the starting level has felt manageable and your back is not clearly worse the next day. If you are not ready, repeat the earlier stage for as long as needed.

EXERCISE	DOSE	HOW TO DO IT
Loaded hip hinge	3 sets 8-10 reps	Hold a light backpack or dumbbells close to your thighs. Push your hips back, then stand tall. Start light and increase the load only when the movement feels controlled.
Bird dog progress	2-3 sets 6 each side	Use the same steady reach from the earlier stage. If comfortable, pause for 5 seconds or reach a little further. Keep your trunk controlled; do not chase a bigger range.
Side plank from knees	2 sets 15-25 sec each side	Lie on your side with knees bent and elbow under shoulder. Lift your hips until your shoulders, hips and knees form a line. Keep breathing; shorten the hold if you lose control.
Sit-to-stand	2-3 sets 8-12 reps	Stand up from a chair and sit down with control. Use your hands or a higher chair to make it easier. Lower the chair or add a light load only when ready.

Progress one thing at a time

When you can complete the top of the repetition range with good control and your back is not clearly worse the next day, make one small change: add a few repetitions, use a slightly larger comfortable range or add a little resistance.

If you are not ready to progress

Repeat the week 1-2 plan, reduce the range or resistance, or leave out an exercise that keeps aggravating your back. You do not need to force painful movement to make progress.

Track the response

CHECK	WHAT TO DO
Week 1	Sessions: 1 / 2 / 3 Back next day: _____
Week 2	Sessions: 1 / 2 / 3 Back next day: _____
Week 3	Sessions: 1 / 2 / 3 Back next day: _____
Week 4	Sessions: 1 / 2 / 3 Back next day: _____

03 / RETURN TO ACTIVITY

Use strength in training and cricket

The aim is to build capacity for the activities you want to return to. Keep comfortable daily activity and training going where you can, then build back towards bowling in steps that match your symptoms and current workload.

For cricket: Batting, Bowling and Gym

Treat bowling, batting and gym sessions as parts of your overall load. When everyday tasks and strength work are going well, build bowling back gradually and change one part of the load at a time, such as session frequency, volume or intensity. This four-week starter is not a return-to-bowling clearance or workload schedule.

When to get help

CHECK	WHAT TO DO
Book an assessment	Arrange a GP or physio assessment if symptoms are worsening, are not starting to improve after about two weeks, make sleep or daily tasks difficult, follow an injury, or come with ongoing leg symptoms.
Seek urgent care	Call 000 or go to an emergency department for new loss of bladder or bowel control, numbness around the genitals or anus, or rapidly worsening leg weakness or loss of feeling.

Why this programme uses exercise

Low back pain can have different causes and presentations, so no single exercise suits everyone. Clinical guidance supports active exercise approaches, including trunk strengthening and endurance, but it does not identify one best exercise or dose. This is a practical starting template, not a tested protocol.

Adolescent fast bowlers with back pain during bowling need an individual assessment because lumbar bone stress injury can occur in this group. Follow age-specific bowling workload guidance when returning.

Further reading

George SZ, et al. Interventions for the Management of Acute and Chronic Low Back Pain: Revision 2021. J Orthop Sports Phys Ther. 2021;51(11):CPG1–CPG60.

Healthdirect Australia. Low back pain. healthdirect.gov.au/low-back-pain

Cricket Australia. Junior Pace Bowling Workload Guidelines. play.cricket.com.au/community/resources/player-safety/junior-bowling-guidelines

General information only. This is not an individual assessment or treatment plan. If you are unsure whether it is suitable for you, seek advice from a physiotherapist or GP.