



Linda Melone is a California-based freelance fitness writer and certified personal trainer. Visit her at [lindamelone.com](http://lindamelone.com).

# Keep Your Back on Track

BY LINDA MELONE



Approximately 80 percent of the adult U.S. population will experience back pain in their lifetime, and runners are not immune from this fate. Back pain in runners typically includes aching on one side, both sides or centrally and may be accompanied by pain in the glutes and hamstrings. It's not always easy to pinpoint the cause of the pain. Tight muscles, inflamed discs, arthritis or a combination may be at work.

"Sitting for extended periods of time, such as in a typical desk job, can cause muscles to tighten and shorten and lead to lower-back pain," says Terri Schneider, running coach, endurance athlete and author of *Triathlon Revolution: Training, Technique and Inspiration*.

"And, some people can get back pain from running," says Schneider.

The solution? Regularly stretching your lower back and hip flexor muscles can help. "The psoas, which attaches to the vertebrae of your lower back and the head of your femur thigh bone, can cause back pain when it's tight," says Schneider. Ideally, stretch every day or at least after every run. In addition, have a running coach or expert analyze your form: Improper running technique and muscular imbalances can cause back problems.

Try these stretches after a thorough warm-up, but don't attempt these moves if you have acute pain, tingling or "pins and needles" down your leg—in that case, see a physician.

**Standing Backbend:** Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and place your fists on your lower back and pull your elbows backward, expanding your chest. Look up toward the ceiling and push your hips forward without allowing your head to drop back. Hold 20 to 30 seconds. Relax and repeat.

**Cat and Cow:** Get on your hands and knees on the floor, with your shoulders positioned over your wrists and hips over your knees. Lower your head as you arch your back up toward the ceiling, tightening your abdominals. Pause for a few seconds, and then slowly bring your head back up as you straighten your back. Hold for a few seconds, and then repeat 10 times.

**The Frog:** Start in a kneeling position. Bring your knees out wide to each side, keeping your ankles directly behind your knees and your feet flexed. Slowly lower your upper body toward the floor, cross your arms and rest your forehead on top of your hands on the floor. Push your hips back, keeping the spine neutral and abdominals firm while taking deep breaths to release muscle tension.

LINDA MELONE BY MARK SAVAGE

## Trainer Tips



### YOGA FOR RUNNERS

Learn how to use yoga to keep your back flexible, decrease your incidence of injury and improve your running with Christine Felstead's *Yoga for Runners* DVD. The four-part workout includes a segment exclusively for the lower back. \$22, [yogaforrunners.com](http://yogaforrunners.com)

### STAY FLEXIBLE

Keep hamstrings flexible to avoid back pain. Try the Stretch Out Strap, with 10 loops to put your foot in, to improve your range of motion. The strap comes with a poster of 20 stretches designed to work your hamstrings and other parts of the body. \$17, [perform-better.com](http://perform-better.com)



### EAT SMART

For advice on how to eat smart and decrease your risk of injuries, read Nancy Clark's *Food Guide for New Runners: Getting It Right From the Start*, which includes tips on how to fuel for runs and create healthy daily menus. \$16, [nancyclarkrd.com](http://nancyclarkrd.com)

