

5 FOUNDATIONAL MOVEMENTS FOR BACK & SPINE HEALTH:

Written by Hannah Breal, PT, DPT, Made 2 Move Physical Therapy

Our spine was designed to do these 5 movements:

ROUNDING YOUR BACK/BENDING OVER: [FLEXION](#)

ARCHING: [EXTENSION](#)

BENDING OVER: [HINGING](#)

TWISTING: [ROTATION](#)

BENDING TO THE SIDE: [SIDEBENDING](#)

For optimal back health, we want these movements to feel comfortable, pain free, and STRONG.

The first step is making sure we can do the simplest form of these movements. THEN we can progress the difficulty, add weight, increase range of motion or speed, etc.

How we progress them depends on:

- How the body is responding and adapting
- Baseline function
- Experience and history
- Symptoms
- Goals

The most IMPORTANT factor to take into account is where we're starting from: what baseline is, how long we've been experiencing pain, our experience and history with these movements and load.

PRO TIPS:

What I'm looking for with each of these movements and progressions with my clients:

- How comfortable is this motion? Is it scary or painful?
- How limited is this motion? Do they have full range?
- How challenging is this movement?
- How do they feel 24-48 hours after doing these exercises?

[HOW TO CUSTOMIZE THESE:](#)

[MOVEMENTS START HERE](#)

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LEVELS EXPLANATION

LEVEL 1: We're assessing range of motion and comfort. Do you feel really limited? Is this movement really painful? This is the simplest and most basic variation of the movement - we're basically trying to see if the body can express this movement at all.

LEVEL 2: We're increasing the range of motion and resistance.

LEVEL 3: We're making this movement more challenging (usually with more weight, load, or force) and adding variability, sometimes even combining movements.

ROUNDING YOUR BACK/BENDING OVER: FLEXION

Level 1

[Cat Cows](#)

- Looks at flexion AND extension

[Seated Jefferson Curl](#)

[Standing Jefferson Curl Against Wall](#)

Level 2

[Standing Jefferson Curl](#)

Elevated Jefferson Curl

- Same as above standing jefferson curl, but stand on a box or a couple of plates so you can reach down further

Level 3

[Elevated Jefferson Curl with Weight](#)

- First movement in this video
- Start with light DB/KB and eventually progress to barbell

[Rotational Jefferson Curl](#)

- one of my favorite ways to progress as this combines multiple movements

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ARCHING: EXTENSION

Level 1

[Cat Cows](#)

- Flexion AND extension

[Prone Press Up on Forearms](#)

Level 2

[Prone Press Up on Hands](#)

[Superman Back Extensions](#)

Level 3

[GHD Hip Extension](#)

[GHD Roll Up](#)

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BENDING OVER: HINGING

Level 1

[Hip Hinge](#)

[PVC Good Morning](#)

Level 2

KB/DB [RDL](#) or [Deadlift](#)

Level 3

Barbell RDL / [Deadlift](#)

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TWISTING: ROTATION

Level 1

[Lumbar Twist](#)
[Twisted Cross](#)

Level 2

[Banded Rotation](#)
[Rotational Jefferson Curl](#)

Level 3

[Rotational Kickstand Deadlift](#)

Increase [Rotational Jefferson Curl](#) weight / Add barbell

BENDING TO THE SIDE: SIDEBENDING

Level 1

[Standing Sidebend](#)

Level 2

[Suitcase Carry](#) / Hold KB stationary
[Suitcase Deadlift](#)
[KB/DB Sidebend](#) (I call these teapots)

Level 3

[Incline Side Bending](#)

- Start without weight and add over time

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HOW TO CUSTOMIZE THESE:

The WAY (how, when, why) we do these movements will be completely dependent on the person. Some examples of how I'd work through this with my clients:

1. If a movement feels really painful:

We have a couple options:

- A. If the pain is generally less than a 3-4/10, it's not sharp or scary, and it DOESN'T increase significantly during/after the movement, we work on that movement regularly until their body gets more comfortable with it.
- B. If the pain is more than a 4/10, it gets worse as they go, and things feel more painful the next day, I modify that movement even more by decreasing the range of motion or maybe doing a different movement altogether.

2. If a movement feels a little uncomfortable, challenging, or limited, but do-able:

THIS IS THE GOLDILOCKS ZONE. This is generally where we want to spend a lot of our time.

Stick with that variation - that's a good level of difficulty. Having some tolerable discomfort (less than a 3-4/10) can actually be really helpful to work through.

3. If a movement feels easy and mostly comfortable

Let's try increasing the weight or difficulty of the movement so that it's more challenging and creates an adaptation.

4. If we're doing these movements without weight

If the main limitation is tightness, pain, or just feeling limited, I'd start by doing the movements every other day, as long as pain doesn't increase significantly the day after.

5. If we're doing these movements WITH weight

Start with once a week - our body needs more time to recover and adapt once we increase load.

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This document and these videos are not intended to provide a diagnosis or substitute for medical advice. By attempting any of the exercises in the video, you do so at your own risk. It is normal to experience some soreness after doing an exercise you are not used to doing. But if your pain increases, moves to a different location or new or different symptoms arise after doing an exercise, you should stop the exercise and seek advice from a physician or physical therapist. We make no representations, guarantees or warranties that the information or exercises in this video are appropriate for you or will result in improvement of your medical condition or function.

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