Stretches to strengthen your core

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(HealthDay)—Ever had a bad spasm from bending down to pick up your child or tie your shoes?

Keeping your core muscles—the workhorses that stabilize your spine—flexible with a stretching routine can help prevent this common occurrence and protect your back in general.

The **Pelvic Tilt** targets your lower back and your abdominals. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet about hip-width apart. Flatten and then press your lower back into the floor. You'll feel your hips tilt forward. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat five times.

The **Side Stretch** helps your back and sides become more limber. In a standing position, extend your right arm above your head. Put your left hand on your hip. Slowly bend to the left without twisting or jerking. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat five times. Then repeat the sequence on the other side.

The **Back Arch** stretches hips and shoulders as well as your back. Stand up straight, legs shoulder width apart. Support your lower back with both hands and bend backwards. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds and repeat five times.

As a reminder, never bounce when stretching. This can cause muscles to tighten and lead to injury. Ease into every stretch with a slow, steady movement. Stop if any stretch feels uncomfortable. You should feel slight tension, but not pain. And do stretches that you hold only when your body is warm—*after* a workout is perfect.

  More information: Love yoga? The American Council on Exercise details how you can use yoga to work core muscles.

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