

A Low Back Approach and Mental Madness

Bowling's Low Back Scare

I've seen lots of back injuries in bowling. I've worked with many of you who've experienced some form of lumbar disorder. I need to work with the rest of you who have lumbar issues and are doing nothing about it. Don't wait before it's too late; let's do something about it!!!!!!!

Your low back, also referred to as the lumbar spine, is one of the most often-injured body parts (DIAGRAM 1). No kidding, it seems like everyday now I meet someone with low back pain. I'll bet you know someone with these same symptoms. In fact, low back injuries occur more often in the workforce than any other injury. Why is that you ask? Well... it (low back) is difficult to condition, considered delicate by many, doesn't have the sex appeal as arms or abs resulting in neglect by the owner, and due to its awkward position on the body...you simply can't see it. No visual acuity there. Because of where it is located, it is often overlooked by even the most dedicated of exercisers.

Open An Account – Lumbar Wellness

Start making consistent deposits, and build your account. Want to avoid a lumbar issue, start conditioning your low back now, to save yourself the hassle of dealing with it later. Trust me, having worked with enough bowlers and even athletes with low back pain, you'll want to avoid it. Start investing your time in a little low back conditioning, and you'll reap a return on your investment far greater than you could imagine.

The low back can only be conditioned through proper exercise, which stabilizes the hips, legs, and spinal column. In sport science, we teach the low back extension to all beginner and intermediate exercisers who want to train their lumbar spine. Although hyperextensions, twists, therapy ball training, yoga, pilates, aquaerobics, and a few low back exercise machines all do the trick, nothing is more convenient for you, the armchair bowler-athlete, than doing stuff at home. If you happen to be motivated enough to look for a specific program as mentioned in the previous sentence, start with your local wellness centers, medical fitness center, or YMCA.

Doing It

I suggest performing 1-2 sets (8-12 reps each) of lumbar extensions 2-3 times a week. Anything more than that, and you're most likely over-training. Anything less than that, and you simply won't see the benefit. So let's get started.

Lie prone on the floor (face down) and place your chin in your hands (DIAGRAM 2). Clasp the hands under the chin as a base of support; however, avoid pulling with the hands on the chin.

To begin this exercise, contract the low back and slowly raise the upper torso upward to your peak or highest point while keeping the lower abdominals and your legs in contact with the floor (DIAGRAM 3). Relax the legs and concentrate on the low back doing all the work. This isn't a big or large movement, so don't expect but to raise up a few inches off the floor. Hold the peak range of your motion, or your highest point possible, for 1-2 seconds, and then return to the starting position.

This exercise requires direct contraction of the quadratus lumborum (low back muscle), hip extensors, glutes, and the hamstrings, all of which support and assist the low back.

I Want More - Add Reps or Weight?

So you want to progress with your training, want to do more, are anxious to keep plugging away. The quandary always arises, do you add more weight or add more repetitions. Some think that doing more weight, stressing at greater intensities, will make a person big and bulky. That couldn't be further from the truth. As it is, very very few people in this world are genetically gifted to the point that they will grow massive without pharmaceutical assistance. Most larger than life athletes you see on television these days were either genetically gifted or are pharmaceutically enhanced. Since we have no need to grow and we might not have the desire to grow, don't be concerned with the fears of looking like Hulk Hogan. You simply don't have the genetic makeup to do so. Even Hulk had help.

However, there is some sustenance to training at higher intensities, but first we must explore training principles and training philosophies a little. There are several training philosophies and training principles that abound in sport science. A training philosophy, differing from a training principle, is the driving force behind your actions. Training principles are the specifics of training, such as sets, repetitions, target training range, time on task, rest between sets, speed of repetitions, and a host of other items.

If you are a beginner or even a slightly intermediate exerciser attempting to condition your low back using the lumbar extension as a starting point, stick to performing the sets and repetitions with slow and methodical precision, while

increasing the number of repetitions and sets up to about 15 reps per set and 3 sets. Anything beyond these will most likely encourage over-training.

As a beginner or intermediate exerciser, I suggest you start rather subtly with this exercise, before you really dive into it with intensity and motivation. Start slowly, cautiously, and methodically to avoid the risk of injury and more importantly to learn the biomechanics of the movement and even the feeling of the lumbar spine working. Furthermore, to avoid Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS) as much as possible, which is one of the leading causes of disengagement during the first six months of a training program. So, I would suggest NOT pushing yourself no matter what you do for the first 6-8 weeks.

You need to allow your body to acclimate to the training, to the new movement. That acclimation period and process will reduce your risk of injury, properly prepare your body and mind for more serious training, greatly reduce any DOMS you may experience, and provide subtle increases in your physical and functional fitness. Jumping into a program or even one specific movement like this, will only fatigue you and greatly reduce your chances of maintaining your frequency of engagement over the long haul.

The Self-Aware Bowler-Athlete

At some point in time, every beginning bowler has felt the sting of self-consciousness. Maybe you tossed a gutter ball or a 3 count on the first ball in front of teammates and opponents; maybe you practiced a game or two of low-ball and people were looking at your score not knowing your practice habit; maybe you went to a gym and told people you were a bowler-athlete training for your sport. Whatever the case may be, each of us has a certain self-consciousness that we hold tightly.

As your social development, often referred to as socialization, has determined for you, you will always hold certain cognitions or beliefs about yourself. These beliefs are not simply self-views (self-image), or how you look, but are rather intricate sets of interactive perceptions. The most complete theory describing the self-concept suggests that people have more than just self-images of themselves (ways in which we view ourselves), more than just images of how we would like to be viewed (desired or ideal self), and more than just images of how we interact with important reference groups (reference-group selves). All of these selves comprise the self-concept, a fundamental part of motivation to bowl or not bowl.

For some time, psychologists have known that a positive self-concept spurs greater involvement and commitment. A hint for center managers, proprietors, pro shop operators, and bowling instructors; if you want to increase your customer commitment, then work on creating a positive self-concept in relation to your center, pro shop, or instruction. Back to you the bowler. This is why the best coaching manuals of other sports stress positive and constructive reinforcement, especially for children and teens. Positive self-concepts of your bowling and bowling ability will enhance your involvement and commitment.

For example, children and teens build and protect their self-image as they make decisions about their sport involvement, or any involvement for that matter. Research suggests that those who are “inner-directed”, those who seek to fulfill personal needs and self-image – are nearly twice as likely to exercise as “outer-directed” people, who are more concerned with what others think. Whether you are honestly concerned with conditioning your lumbar spine or just simply concerned about what others think of you, training your body and mind to become a highly prepared bowler-athlete will propel you toward the level of competitiveness you seek. If you put aside your self-consciousness when you enter the gym, you will always be more likely to succeed with your training, which always translates over to your bowling.

I recently introduced another touring professional bowler to bowling-specific training. His greatest fear was not of success or failure on the lanes, but what others in the gym thought of him training for his sport.....bowling. Whether you train at home or in the gym, be proud that you are committed to enhancing your athleticism through the sport sciences.