



Top 10 Quick Fixes For Low Back Pain in Athletes

by

[Ben Greenfield](#)

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clickable, so have fun!**

[Dr. Mather](#) adjusted his black spine treatment table and then ran his expert hands up and down my spine a few times.

“The biggest mistake that runners make when they injure their backs is they stop exercising.”

I grimaced as the doctor’s fingers palpated two very sore spots on the right lower side of my back, directly above my hip, **“Don’t you just do more damage when you push through the pain, doc?”**

He was down by my legs now, measuring them up and checking for any leg length discrepancies, “Well sure, if you just keep running you’ll do more damage, but there are a ton of other activities you can do to keep *blood flow* to the injured area and enhance the healing and recovery process.”

“Like what?”

“Just think about it: water running, elliptical trainer, recumbent bicycle, light stretching...about the worst thing you can do is just sit on the couch.”

At this point, he had me roll over onto my back, “I can tell your lower back and *sacroiliac joint* are locked up, but you’ve done some muscular damage too.”

This was the last thing I wanted to hear, especially with a half marathon just 5 weeks away, **“What can I do?”**

“I’d tell you, but then I’d have to kill you.”

Nice. A chiro with a sense of humor.

Fortunately, he did tell me. He told me everything.

And over the next year, I was able to harvest a goldmine of valuable back healing information from Dr. Mather, along with the other sports medicine physicians and physical therapists who I worked with on a daily basis in a sports medicine clinic, along with the nutritionists, massage therapists and chiropractors I interviewed on my free online [health and fitness audio podcast](#).

You now possess a handy culmination of that sage advice – “The Top 10 Quick Fixes for Low Back Pain in Athletes”. Enjoy.

1. To RICE or Not To Rice?

When you first injure your back, you might do what you'll find many websites and books tell you to do when you're injured – the “RICE” protocol.

RICE stands for Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation. And it works for some injuries.

Unfortunately, the RICE protocol, specifically the first three letters of the protocol, is one of the worst things you can do when you injure your low back.

By restricting mobility and blood flow to the injured area, the “R I and C”, (Rest, Ice and Compression) will simply cause you to become more stiff, more sore, and slower to recover.

Under no circumstances should you grab an ice pack and lie down on the couch for the week when you injure your back or when your back is aching after a workout. You should also be careful simply wrapping a tight “back belt” like furniture movers wear around your waistline and trying to push through pain.

Instead, during the “acute” phase of an injury, when your back has just begun to hurt, one of the best things you can do is to grab a [heat blanket or heat pad](#), place it on the ground, then lie with your back against the pad and your legs elevated up against the wall or up on a chair. Do this every morning, until your back has stopped hurting and before every workout or attempt to run. Try to do it before bed too, if possible.

As soon as the stiffness has subsided, which is typically within 24 hours, begin to move. It is OK to begin walking, [aqua running](#), elliptical training, or light weightlifting with slight discomfort – since the movement and blood flow can actually help your back to heal more quickly, and also maintain your fitness.

2. NSAID's

I'd highly recommended you avoid NSAID's, or "Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs" which include over the counter or prescription drugs like ibuprofen, Celebrex, Vioxx – and just about anything most doctors are going to prescribe as a way to control the pain and get your back to relax.

The truth is that NSAIDS actually impede cartilage repair and can cause cartilage loss. Studies have also associated NSAIDS with "thromboembolic" phenomena, including heart attacks kidney damage, and GI bleeds accounting for around 16,500 deaths each year.

Put that number in context. More people die from NSAIDS than from HIV infection. The death toll from Vietnam War was around 50,000 over 11 years. $16,500 \times 11 = 181,500$, and that's a number of deaths that you should pay attention to, especially considering that when you are exercising or in hot weather (or both) the effects of NSAID's are significantly amplified.

So what's the answer? Tylenol may help a little, but certainly won't do the trick. Another alternative for pain from inflammation is called "Phenocane". I am currently researching Phenocane, which contains potent plant antifungals called curcumin and boswellia, which can actually shut down production of macrophages, killer cells and other weapons of mass destruction that cause a cascade of pain signals in your body. Phenocane also contains 1) Nattokinase, an excellent natural therapeutic against the formation of pulmonary embolisms, which could replace medications such as coumadin and Plavix; and 2) phenylalanine, an amino acid that helps the amplify the effect of the body's natural pain killers (endorphins).

By the time you read this, I will likely have interviewed a doc about this, so go to BenGreenfieldFitness.com and do a search for Phenocane.

And also pay attention to many of the other healing mechanisms that I talk about in this manual, because you may find that you do not even need ibuprofen, any other NSAID, or even the new and natural Phenocane.

These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. No products on this page are being prescribed, and no products on this page are intended to diagnose, treat, prevent or cure disease.

3. Epsom Salts

When you first injure your back, a hot soak in [Epsom Salts](#) can work wonders for reducing spasms and tightness, and helping your back muscles to relax their death grip of pain on your spine.

Why does this work?

Every muscle operates via a fine electrochemical balance, and the electrolytes in Epsom salts can help to displace some of the charges across the muscular membrane, particularly those from calcium, and thus cause a muscle that is contracted (i.e. from a response to pain or stress) to relax.

As a matter of fact, often these types of “spasm” contractions can often precede a back injury or onset of back pain.

Regardless of which came first, the chicken or the egg, a hot soak in Epsom Salts should be a key component of your low back injury prevention and treatment strategy – something that you do the day of or the day after any long hard training sessions, and something that you also do if you become injured.

Here's a couple tips:

Don't get the water too hot, as this can reduce effectiveness of the salts. Try to keep the water under 103 degrees...

Use about ½ - 1 cup for an entire bath...

If you really want an Epsom Salts on steroids, then you MUST try the [Ancient Minerals Magnesium Flakes](#), which work much faster and are literally like magic for reducing post-injury or post-workout soreness...

Once you're done with the soak, proceed to the tip on the next page...which involves more salt!

4. Topical Magnesium

If you've already seen my manual [“Recover Like Wolverine from X-Men”](#), you may already know all about Transdermal Magnesium Therapy, or topical magnesium.

You may also already know about them if you've read Carolyn Dean's life-changing book, [“How To Change Your Life With Magnesium”](#), which includes a bonus chapter that I wrote entitled *“How Magnesium Instantly Made Me A Better Athlete”*.

To truly get a rich, multi-media experience that explains how transdermal magnesium therapy actually works, you should [click here and listen](#) to a great interview about a shocking compound that pharmaceutical companies would probably prefer you did not know about.

After I interviewed this physician, and actually got my hands on some magnesium oil, I began to use it regularly on my sore limbs.

But the first time I was truly exposed to it's powerful healing properties was when I was recovering two days after a long 2.5 hour run on the concrete, and had excessively sore feet.

Prior to my afternoon swim, I was putting some magnesium oil on my **shoulders**, and accidentally spilled some all over the floor. I thought “What the heck, my feet are sore, why not mop it up with my feet”. So I did.

By the time I arrived at the pool twenty minutes later, the soreness in my feet had completely disappeared.

BOOM! Not only was my shoulder pain gone (as I expected) but my “chronic” foot pain had vanished.

The sad fact is that 75% of athletes are deficient in magnesium and don't even know it. But it can rapidly accelerate healing, and I'd highly recommend it as a topical anti-inflammatory.

I personally use a brand of [magnesium oil developed in Europe and called “Ancient Minerals”](#), and this is the same brand that all my coached athletes utilize.

5. Proteolytic Enzymes

The term "proteolytic" refers to all enzymes that digest, or "lyse" protein. In your body, proteolytic digestive enzymes are produced in the pancreas, but if you're injured or in need of enhanced recovery, then forms of proteolytic enzymes can be harvested from fungal or bacterial sources, extracted from the pancreas of livestock animals (namely trypsin and chymotrypsin) or extracted from plants (namely, papain from the papaya and Bromelain from pineapples).

Perhaps the strongest evidence for benefits of proteolytic enzyme supplements come from numerous European studies showing particular enzyme blends to be effective in accelerating recovery from exercise and injury in athletes as well as patients recovering from surgery. In one study of soccer players suffering from ankle injuries, proteolytic enzyme supplements sped up healing and got players back on the field nearly twice as fast as athletes assigned to receive a placebo tablet!

A handful of other small studies in athletes have shown enzymes can help reduce inflammation, speed healing of bruises and other tissue injuries (including fractures), and reduce overall recovery time. In patients recovering from surgery, treatment with proteolytic enzymes significantly reduced swelling, bruising and stiffness compared to placebo groups.

My top recommended source of proteolytic enzymes is called [Recoverease](#), and is made by a company called Wicked Fast, who I discovered after they began sponsoring me in the sport of triathlon. The reason I like it is that there are no gooey gels or messy powders to mix and choke down. You simply swallow your Recoverease capsules with water or your favorite sports drink, or a post-workout meal

I take 2-4 Recoverease after a day's workout, 4-6 leading up to a tough workout or race, and 6-8 immediately after a hard workout or race – *and I always take 8 after I've experienced an injury.*

Since I began doing that, I have noticed a drastic improvement in the speed of healing, and I now have clients and athletes who will "load" with Recoverease the week leading up to a surgery to help them bounce back much faster!

So you don't have to gnaw on a pig pancreas – instead, just grab some [Recoverease](#).

6. Massage?

When it comes to low back injuries and injury prevention, massage is a tricky topic.

Typically, when you approach a massage therapist complaining of a tight back or sore spot in the upper hips, they will lay you down on a nice, comfortable massage table, they may place a heating pad or heating towel on your back (good move!), and then they will firmly work the length of your spine in a way that seems to completely draw the pain out and completely relax your body.

And then you walk out, and that afternoon, or perhaps the next day, you injure your back more horribly than you could have ever imagined.

How could this happen?

After that massage, your body “lets down” it's guard. Specifically, the muscles in your low back become relaxed, de-stressed, and in the same way that they can release their painful grip on your spine when you use something like a magnesium treatment, they release their grip on your spine when they are induced to a deep state of relaxation by the massage.

The problem with the massage therapy is that it can sometimes be so potent and so powerful that your back muscles become like relaxed, weak, floppy noodles, completely unable to support you and protect your sensitive joints once you subject them to a load – a load such as running, lifting weights, jumping or moving furniture.

Therefore, you must utilize massage therapy wisely. Here is my recommendation:

Use massage as a tool, at least once a month, to assist your body in relaxation and to release the muscular adhesions that can limit your range of motion and lead to a chronic repetitive motion injury. But if you are prone to low back pain or “throwing your back out”, do not use massage therapy 24-48 hours before a hard workout, a race, or a difficult training session.

Easy enough?

7. Stretch

Yawn.

You've heard this one before, right?

But are you really understanding what goes on when you stretch?

Imagine your pelvic bone, and visualize it as a bucket of water.

If your pelvis is tilted forward, then water spills out the front of your bucket.

If your pelvis is tilted back, then water spills out the back of your bucket.

But if the muscles surrounding your pelvic are properly aligned, then the water remains in the bucket and your pelvis remains in what is called a "neutral" alignment.

These muscles include four groups: your abdominal muscles, which attach to the upper front of the bucket, your low back muscles, which attach to the upper back of the bucket, your hip flexors, which attach to the lower front of the bucket, and your hamstrings, which attach to the lower back of the bucket.

Now, think about what happens if you hamstrings are tight. Go ahead – visualize that bucket. Hamstrings attach to the lower back of the bucket, they tighten up, and water spills out the back of your bucket.

How about tight hip flexors? That's right...water out the front of the bucket. A tight stomach? Well, that's actually a good thing – because if you have tight hamstrings, a tight stomach, or strong abdominals, can help re-align the bucket.

A strong low back can do the same thing to balance out tight hip flexors.

So why not get the best of both worlds? It's absolutely simple.

Strengthen your abs, strengthen your low back, stretch your hip flexors, and stretch your hamstrings to maintain a full bucket, a neutral pelvic alignment and less stress on your low back.

A combination of Yoga and Pilates would be a great place to start.

8. Your Butt

During one of my free online [health and fitness audio podcasts](#) with Dr. Mather, we discover a brand new research finding that discovered the #1 cause of low back pain in both regular people and in athletes.

Do you know what the #1 cause was?

A weak butt.

You see, your butt muscles are responsible for two primary actions: hip extension (i.e. when you push off the ground or when you kick out behind your body) and external hip rotation (i.e. when you move side to side, or you land in a single stance phase while you're running).

When your hips don't move properly, and they're not stabilized properly by the butt muscles, do you know which *other* muscles, joints and ligaments, which are also attached to the pelvis bone, are forced to overwork themselves?

That's right – your lower back muscles and a sensitive joint called your sacroiliac joint, which is also known as your "SI Joint".

So how can you keep this from happening? Strengthen your butt, of course.

Here are my top recommendations for butt strengthening exercises (you can check out the videos for these exercises by [clicking here](#)).

- Fire Hydrants*
- *Kick-outs*
- *Hip Hikes*
- *Single Leg Bridges*
- [Gymstick](#) *Leg Swings*
- [Elastic Mini-Band](#) *Side Steps*

For each of these, perform 2-3 sets to muscular failure (i.e. butt burning!)

9. Core Care

As a personal trainer, fitness coach, and biomechanist, one of my biggest pet peeves is when I walk into a gym and see people doing the following...

...crunches with twists...

...incline sit-ups while twisting with a medicine ball ...

...sit-ups with rotation...

...ab machines that involve rotation...

...and pretty much any exercise that combines bending or extending the low back with twisting the low back.

Anyone who has a healthy and strong back with a completely mobile and freely rotating sacroiliac joint can handle these exercises just fine. That's about 5% of the population.

Everybody else (and this includes anyone who ever gets a tight low back or low back pain) should avoid these exercise like the plague, because a *combination of flexion and rotation while in a seated position is one of the most risky motions to which your spine can be subjected.*

The discs and ligaments in your spine are just great at cushioning and stabilizing your back in a single plane of motion, but unless you're a well-trained athlete, once you begin combining these complex movements with a position that puts a great deal of stress on your back (in this case, sitting), you're setting yourself up to get injured.

Think about it. When does your low back hurt the most?

Typically when you're sitting for a long period of time in your car or in your office OR when you're running or doing other forms of twisting under pressure, like weightlifting.

Now, combine those two activities and imagine the pressures that are placed on your back. Pretty scary, huh? Don't subject your back to those pressures. Have care with your core.

10. The “SI Joint” Syndrome

This is, in my opinion, the most important section of this manual. In the opinion of Dr. PZ Pearce, a sports medicine physician and colleague I worked with at a sports medicine clinic, sacroiliac joint issues are the #1 most undiagnosed issue in active individuals who go the doctor with low back pain.

By combining proper diagnosis of SI Joint Syndrome with chiropractic adjustments and stabilization exercises, Dr. Pearce has been able to achieve massive low back pain elimination success in the athletes that he treats.

Since this manual isn't meant to be a college course in anatomy, you only need to understand the basic underlying issue – your pelvic bone has a joint called the sacroiliac joint, and the two surfaces of that joint can become stuck together, or “locked”, if someone has a weak butt and core, tight hip flexors and hamstrings, and poor physical activity form.

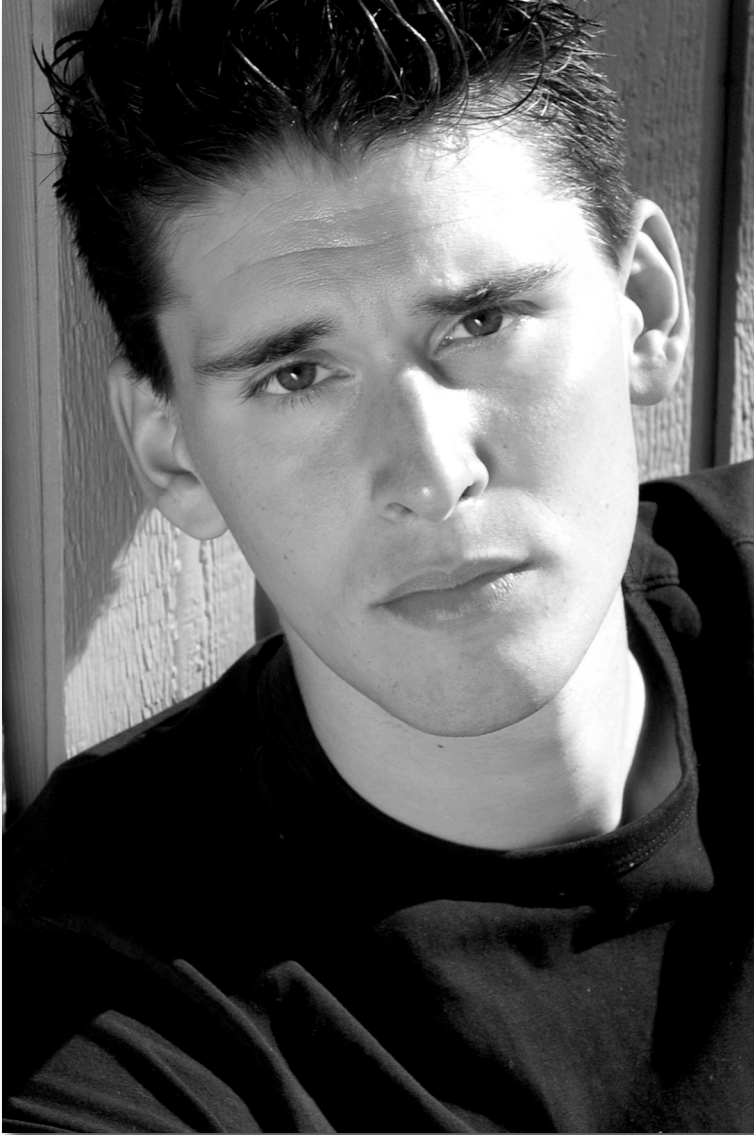
Typically when you are “locked”, your pelvis is in rotation, with one side rotated forward and one side rotated back – and this usually causes deep and sometimes debilitating pain on a single side of your low back, typically above the hip. When this happens, it is called “SI Joint Syndrome”.

I have interviewed Dr. Pearce about this on video in the [Rock Star Triathlete Academy](#), and I have also written an entire manual called [“Run With No Pain”](#), which is designed to lengthen, or stretch, the lateral hip rotators and strengthen, or shorten, the medial hip rotators, thus naturally re-aligning your hips and SI joint.

As a matter of fact, if you struggle with chronic low back pain, one of the best steps you can take is to find a doc who can properly diagnose and treat the pain, find a chiropractic physician who is not crazy (preferably one who works with your local sports teams), and then supplement their treatments with the entire low back pain elimination syndrome that I outline in [“Run With No Pain”](#).

Remember that the proper treatments for low back pain are synergistic, meaning that when you combine them all, each one builds upon the next to completely annihilate your pain. If you found this manual to be helpful, please check out the other solutions that I offer in the following pages!

About The Author



Ben Greenfield is a nationally recognized authority in sports nutrition, endurance sports training, fat loss, wellness and human performance.

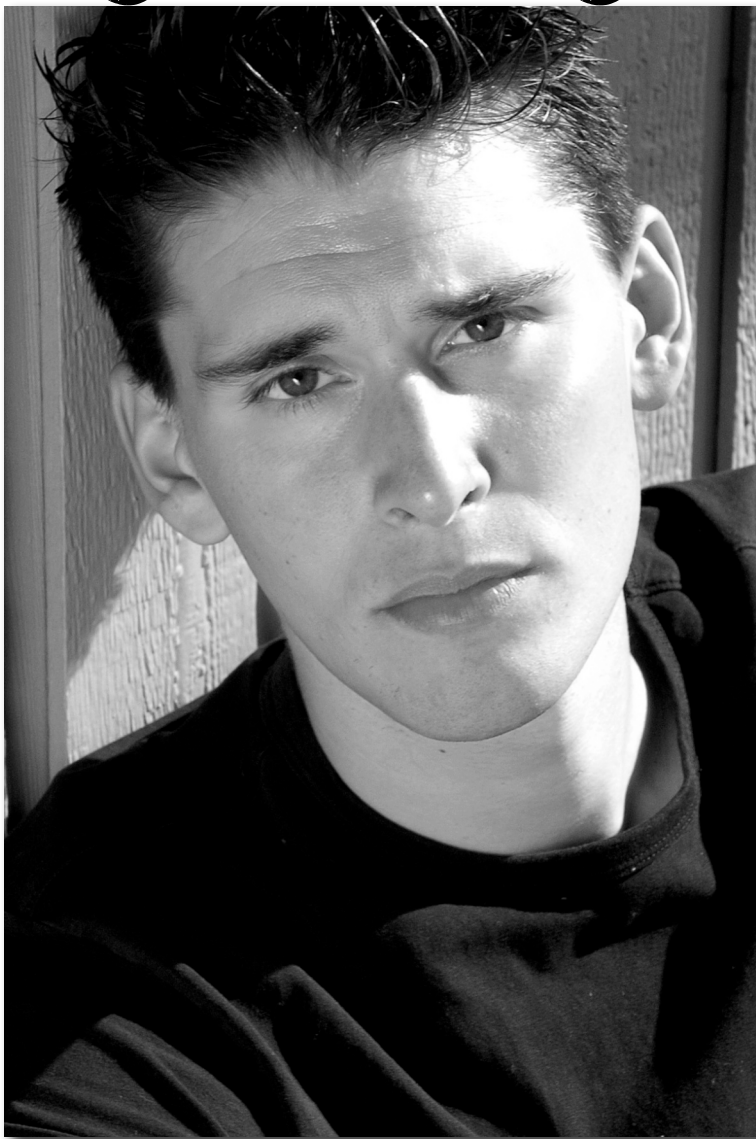
Ben offers a free blog and podcast, which you can access by [clicking here](#), and has authored a wide range of highly entertaining and practical books and DVD's about sports performance and nutrition, including Run With No Pain, The Triathlon Dominator, Bulletproof Knee, and much more.

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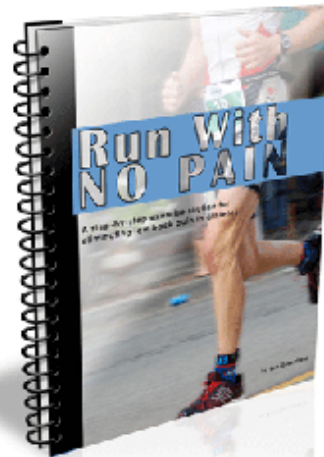
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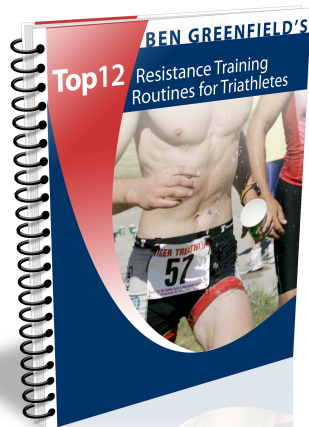
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