



E A S I N G

B A C K

P A I N

D U R I N G

S E X

Finding Comfortable
Positions



IS THERE SEX AFTER BACK PAIN?

When you have a back problem, even simple actions—such as getting undressed or hugging your partner—may make you cringe in pain. If just the thought of having sex sends a pain spasm up your spine, this booklet may benefit both you and your partner. Once you understand how to support and protect your back, having sex may not seem so difficult. In fact, you can probably return to sex sooner than many other physical activities, so talk and plan with your partner now.



When Pain Gets in the Way

If a back problem lingers for weeks or months, you may feel like pain is running your life. When it hurts to move, fear of pain—as much as pain itself—can keep you from trying even normal activities. You may find yourself less involved both at home and at work. As disappointments and frustrations add up, you may wonder if you'll ever be pain-free again. These worries can make it harder to deal with your partner. And, if pain keeps the two of you from enjoying sex, you may both feel so dissatisfied that your relationship begins to suffer.

This booklet is not intended as a substitute for professional health care.

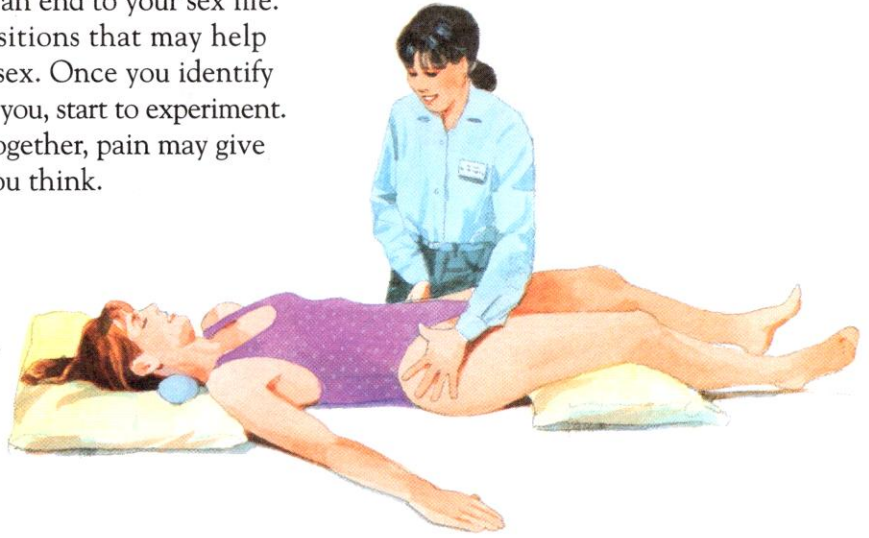
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Using This Book

Back pain doesn't have to put an end to your sex life. In this booklet you'll find positions that may help you control back pain during sex. Once you identify which positions might work for you, start to experiment. If you and your partner work together, pain may give way to pleasure sooner than you think.

Learn Ways to Ease Pain

After the cause of your back pain is diagnosed, your doctor or a physical therapist can teach you how to support your back to help minimize pain. You may learn special exercises and new ways of moving.



Work Together as Partners

Share this booklet with your partner. It doesn't matter whether you read it together or separately. What matters is that you both begin talking about your needs—emotional as well as sexual ones.



Find Comfortable Positions

When you and your partner are both ready, start experimenting to find comfortable positions for having sex. First, try a position that supports your back. Later, when you're moving around more easily, you can try positions that offer less support but still protect your back.



KNOW YOUR BACK

Your back is made up of many parts, such as hard bones, cushioning disks, and flexible muscles. When your back is healthy, these parts form natural curves, which help keep your body in balance. If you maintain this balance, your back is likely to move safely and comfortably.

Parts of the Back

Vertebrae are small bones linked together. This forms the spine.

Disks are cushioning pads between vertebrae. Disks absorb shock and friction, allowing the vertebrae to move smoothly.

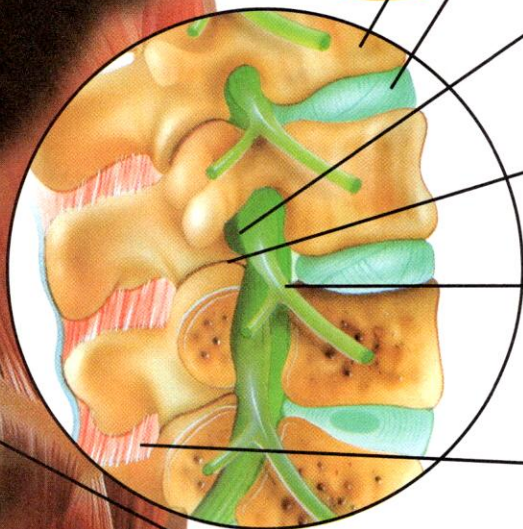
Foramina are the open spaces between vertebrae where the nerves exit.

Facets are the joints between the vertebrae.

Nerves are fibers that branch out from the spine, carrying sensory messages—such as pain—to and from the brain.

Ligaments are bands of soft tissue that link the vertebrae.

Muscles are strong, flexible fibers that hold the spine in place and take strain off the disks and vertebrae.



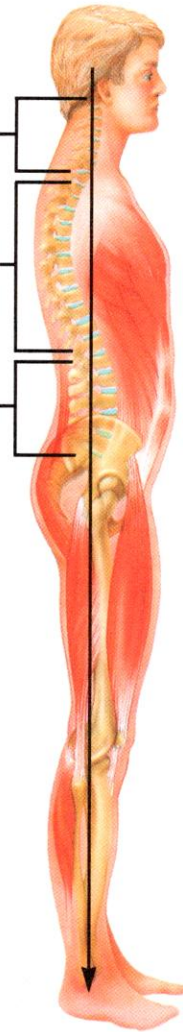
Three Natural Curves

A healthy back naturally falls into an S-shape, which is formed by the three curves of the spine. These curves distribute weight evenly throughout the spine, so you're less likely to injure your back.

Cervical curve (the neck) supports the head.

Thoracic curve (the middle back) supports the ribs.

Lumbar curve (the low back) supports most of your body weight.

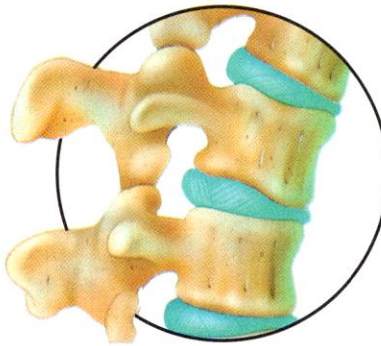


Lining Up the Curves

Your three natural curves are positioned correctly when your ears, shoulders, hips, and ankles are all aligned. This ideal **neutral position** is the goal of good posture. Your back is safest when it is in this position. But, what if your most comfortable back position isn't the ideal neutral? In such a case, your physical therapist may work with you to gradually bring your curves more closely into alignment.

How Your Back Moves

All the parts of your back work together to allow movement. Normal back movements include **flexion** (curving forward) and **extension** (arching backward), as well as bending sideways and rotating. The amount of movement in any one direction depends on the health of your vertebrae and disks, as well as the strength and flexibility of your muscles. Moving too far in any direction may place excess pressure on disks and nerves or strain muscles or ligaments.



Flexion
When you curve forward, vertebrae squeeze the front of the disks.



Extension
When you arch backward, vertebrae squeeze the back of the disks.



Side Bending
When you bend to either side, the rims of the disks absorb the pressure from the vertebrae.



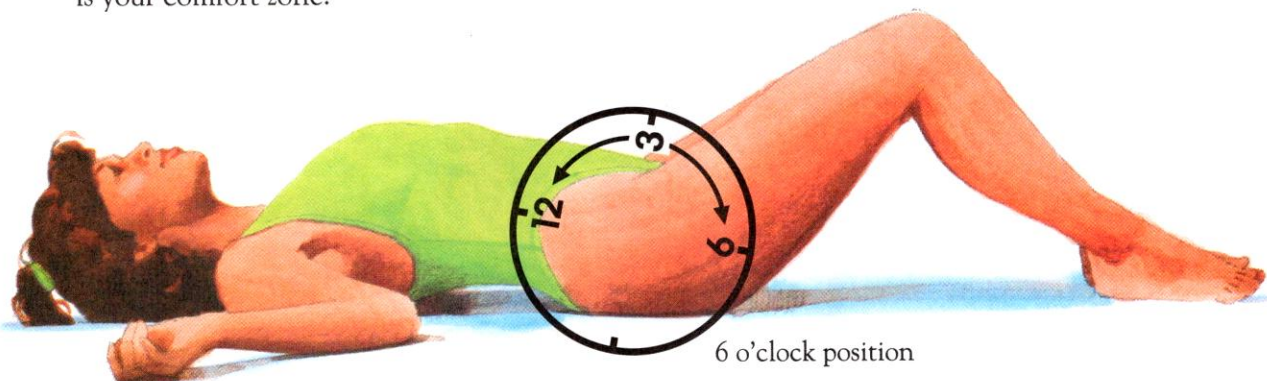
Rotating
When you twist your back or neck, vertebrae rotate over the disks, which absorb any friction.

LET COMFORT BE YOUR GUIDE

Once your doctor has diagnosed your back problem, your doctor or physical therapist can show you how to move more comfortably. Depending on your back, some flexion or extension may help ease your symptoms. Or, you may find that you're most comfortable when your spine is in a neutral position. Knowing where your back feels best can help you choose comfortable positions for having sex.

Finding Your Comfort Zone

The pelvic tilt, shown below, can help you identify the zone where your back is most comfortable. Then, by supporting your back in this position, you can minimize pain during sex. Keep in mind that your comfort zone may change as your back heals. If the pelvic tilt doesn't help you find your comfort zone, stand and put your hands on your hips. Curve (flex) your back forward, then slowly arch (extend) backward. At what point does your back feel best? This is your comfort zone.



The Pelvic Tilt

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat. Think of your pelvis as a clock face.

- ◆ Tilt the pelvis up toward 12 o'clock. (Always remember: don't push into pain.) Then, tilt the pelvis down through the 3 o'clock position toward 6 o'clock. Repeat the pelvic tilt slowly several times. At what point does your back feel most comfortable?
- ◆ **Your back is flexed** when your pelvis is near 12 o'clock.
- ◆ **Your back is in neutral** when your pelvis is near 3 o'clock, that is, between 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock.
- ◆ **Your back is extended** when your pelvis is near 6 o'clock.

BEFORE RETURNING TO SEX

Get your doctor's approval before returning to sex, especially if you're recovering from back surgery. Also, be sure to follow any special instructions your doctor or physical therapist gives you.

To Flex, Stay Neutral, or Extend?

Depending on whether flexing, aligning, or extending the spine feels best, follow the appropriate tips below to support your back during sex. No matter which position is right for you, always place a thin pillow or neck roll under your neck to support the cervical curve when you lie on your back or side.

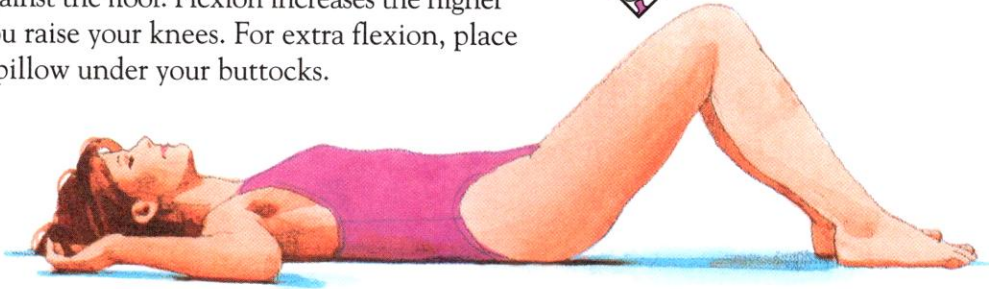


Not for
Sore
Necks

This icon appears next to positions that are not safe for people with neck problems.

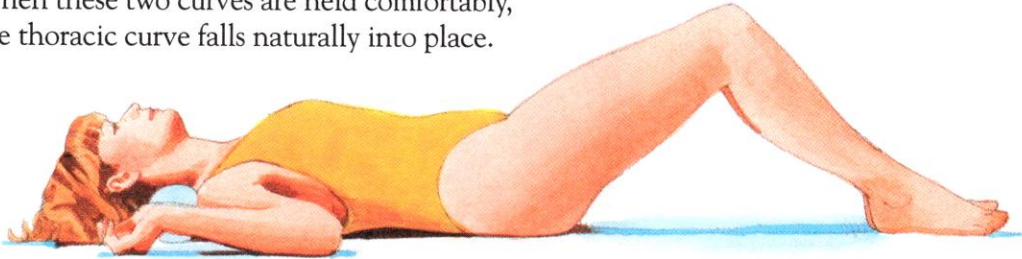
12 o'clock: Flexed

To flex the spine, flatten your low back against the floor. Flexion increases the higher you raise your knees. For extra flexion, place a pillow under your buttocks.



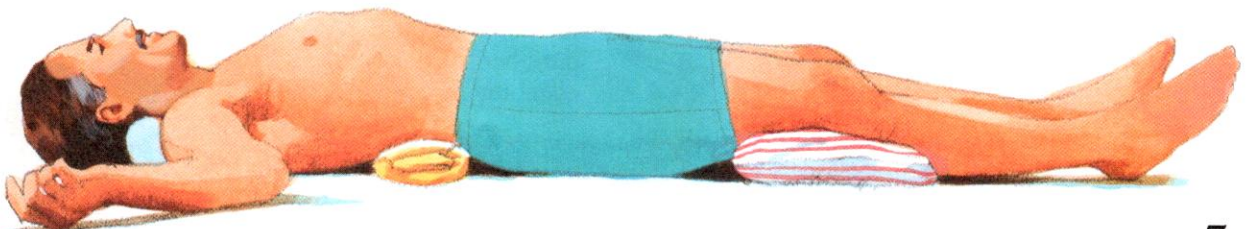
3 o'clock: Neutral

To hold the spine in a neutral position, align the back's three natural curves. You can maintain the cervical and lumbar curves with rolled towels or special orthopaedic supports. When these two curves are held comfortably, the thoracic curve falls naturally into place.



6 o'clock: Extended

To extend the spine, support the lumbar curve with a rolled towel or a lumbar roll. You may want to place a small pillow under your knees for greater comfort.



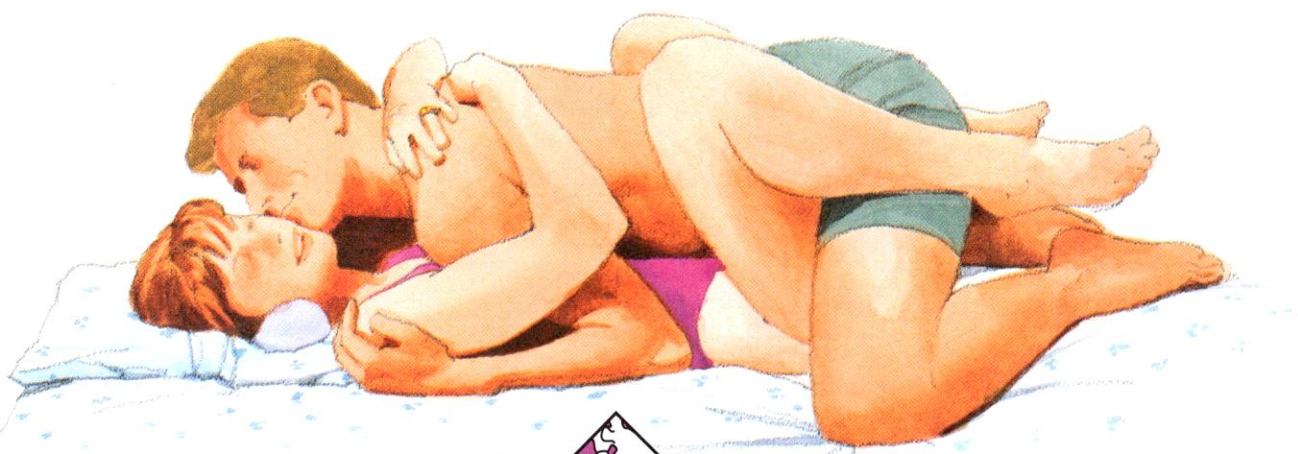
CHOOSING POSITIONS

As you and your partner choose the position you'd like to try first, select from those with the icon that's right for you. Remember your comfort zone. Does your spine need to be flexed, held in neutral, or extended? Once you've selected a position, adapt it to suit the specific needs of you and your partner. Let comfort be your guide as you experiment.

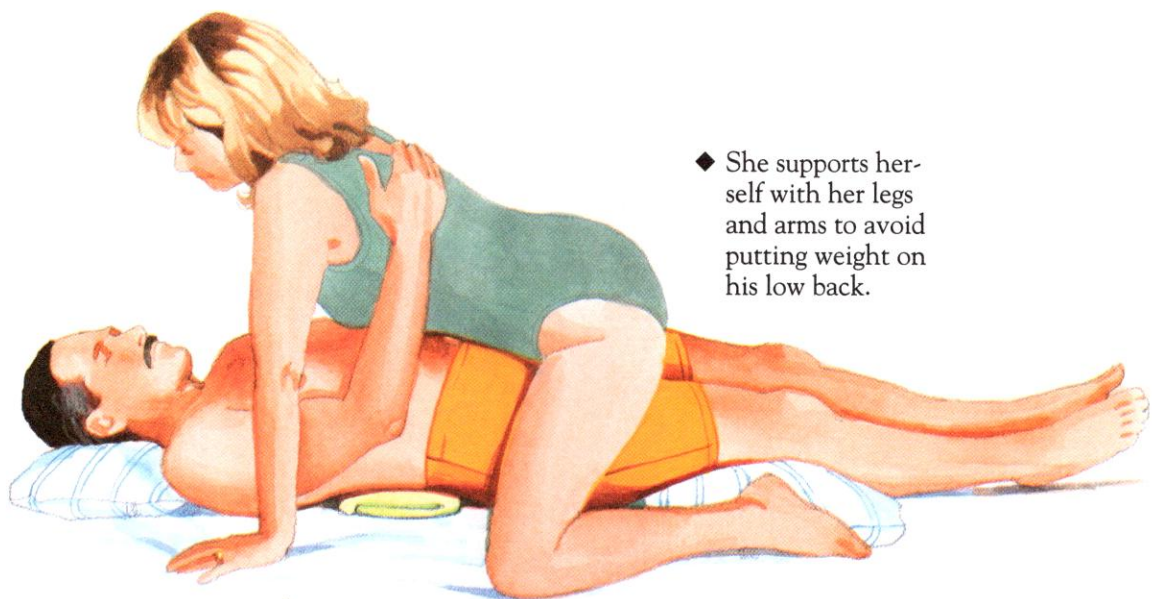
LYING ON YOUR BACK

If you can bear your partner's weight, lying on your back provides a stable position for having sex. Because your back is supported by the bed or floor, less physical strain is placed on your muscles. Use a small pillow or neck roll to support your cervical curve, keeping it in line with the rest of your back.

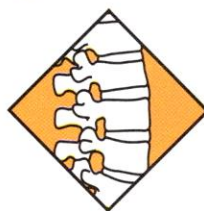
- ◆ He supports himself with his arms and knees. Very little of his weight falls on his partner.



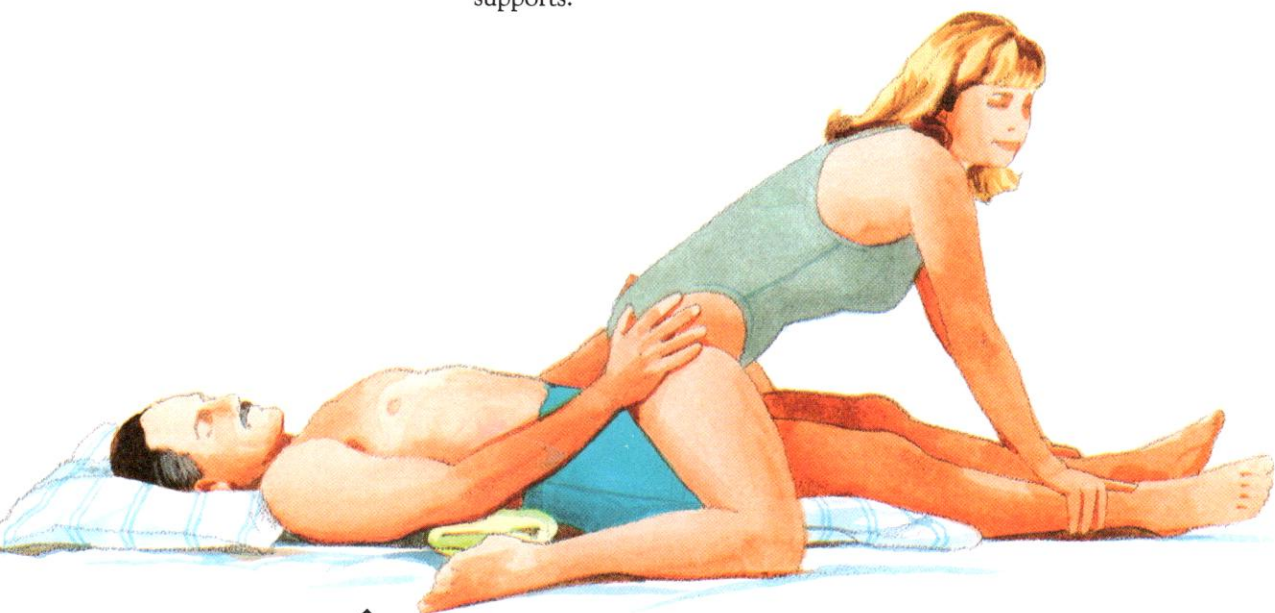
To flex the spine, she raises her knees until her back feels comfortable.



◆ She supports herself with her legs and arms to avoid putting weight on his low back.



To keep the spine in neutral, he aligns his natural curves. The cervical and lumbar curves are maintained with small, rolled towels or other supports.

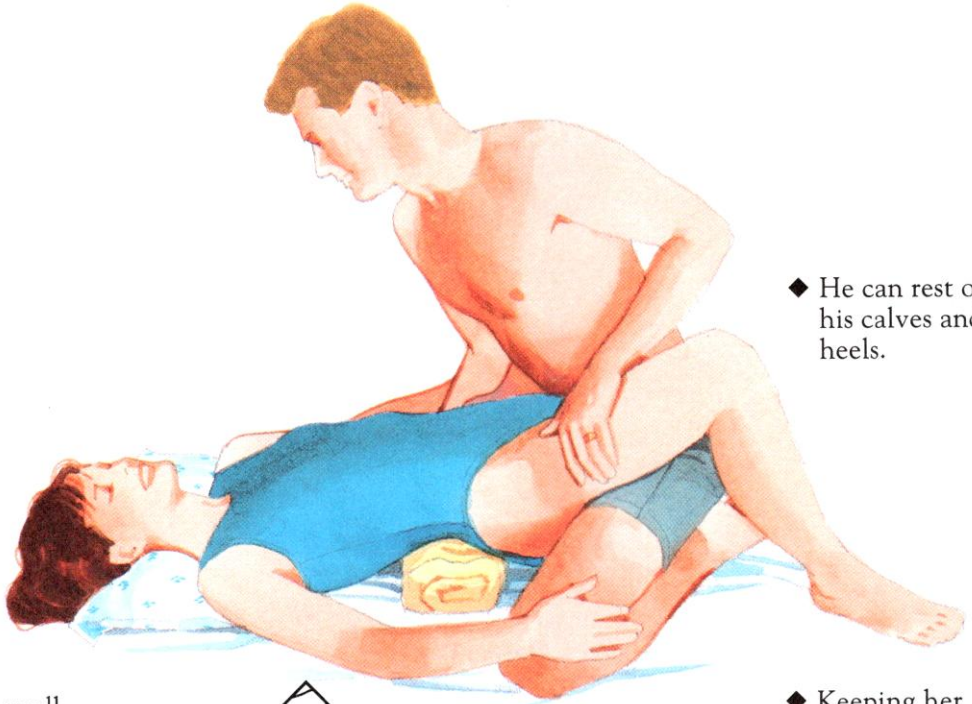


To extend the spine, he supports his low back with a lumbar roll or a large, rolled towel.

◆ She supports her upper body with her arms. Her hands are placed on or near his ankles.

CHOOSING POSITIONS

LYING ON YOUR BACK



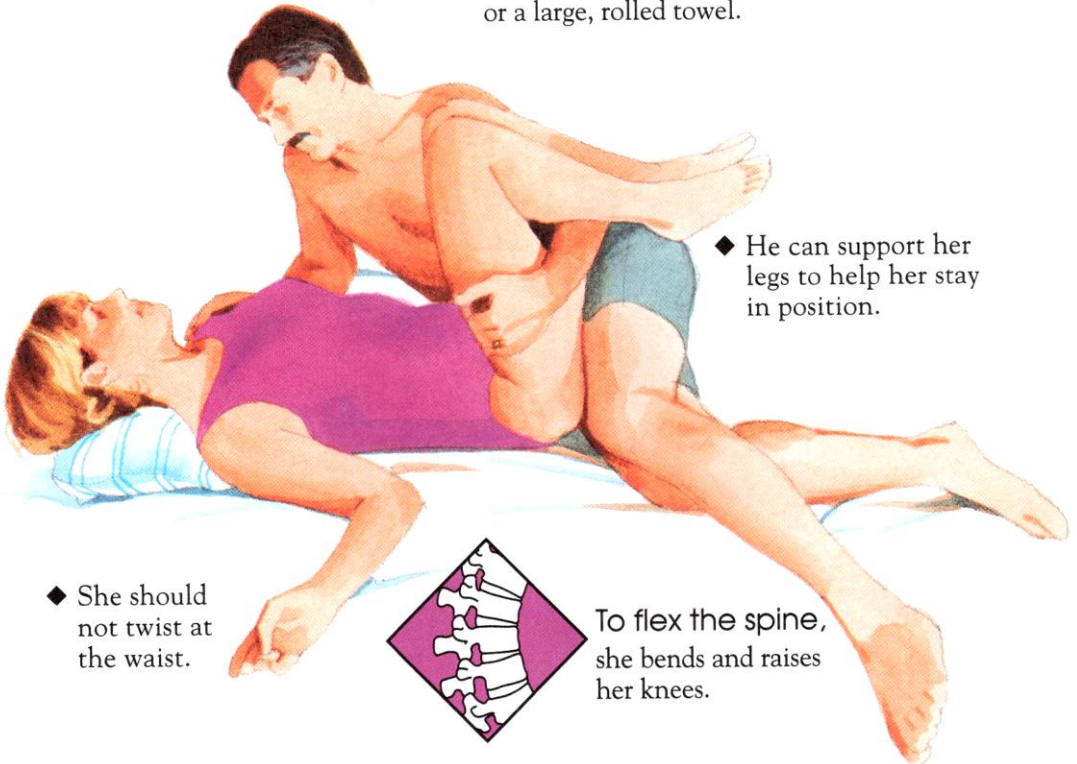
◆ He can rest on his calves and heels.

◆ Place a small pillow under her neck to support the cervical curve.



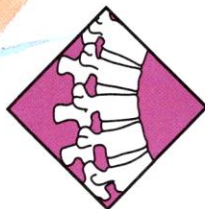
To extend the spine, she supports her low back with a lumbar roll or a large, rolled towel.

◆ Keeping her feet flat on the bed helps her body remain stable.



◆ He can support her legs to help her stay in position.

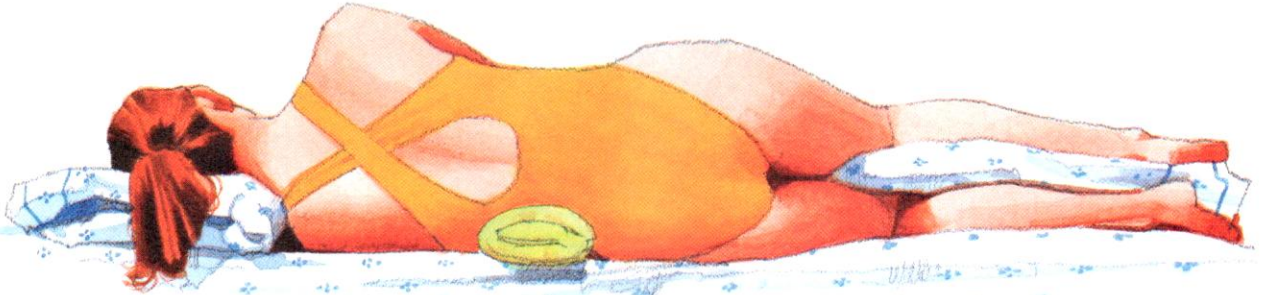
◆ She should not twist at the waist.



To flex the spine, she bends and raises her knees.

SIDE LYING

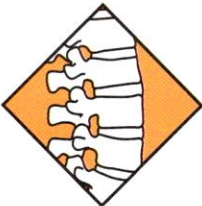
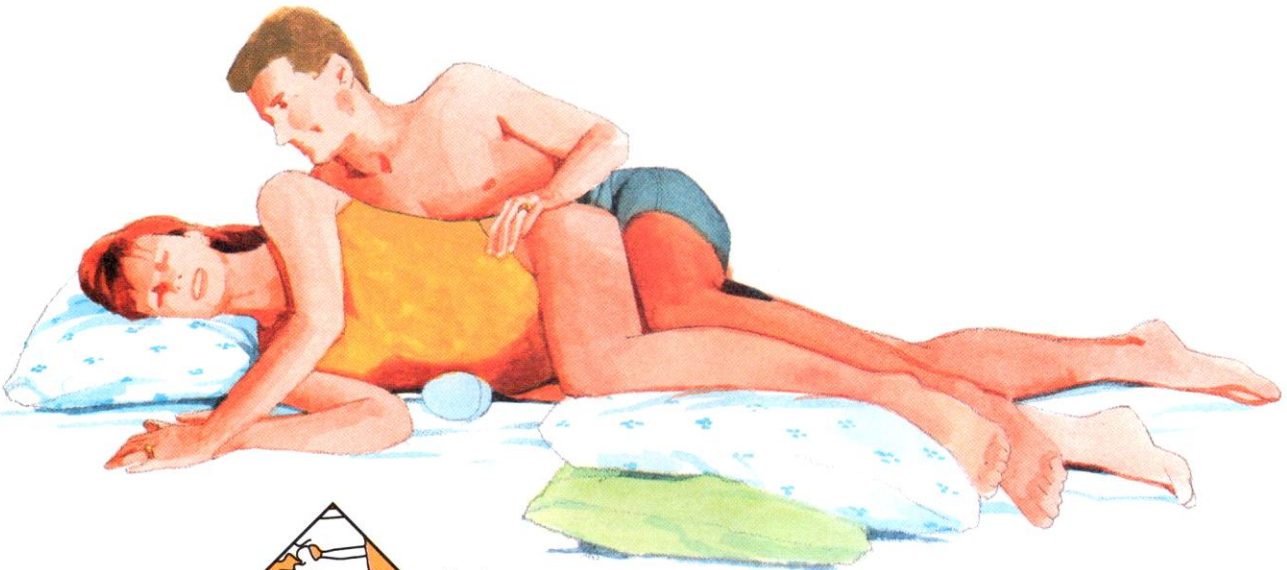
In the early, acute stages of back pain, side lying can be one of the most comfortable positions. It is safe for almost everyone, since neither partner bears any weight. Side lying is typically a neutral position, but the partner in pain can flex or extend slightly by changing the position of the knees and pelvis. Be careful not to drop the hip or shoulder forward. This twists the spine.



◆ Place a pillow under her neck, so her head doesn't drop down.

◆ She can support her waist with a rolled towel to keep her spine aligned.

◆ Bending the knees helps keep her body stable.



To keep the spine in neutral, support both her head and waist.

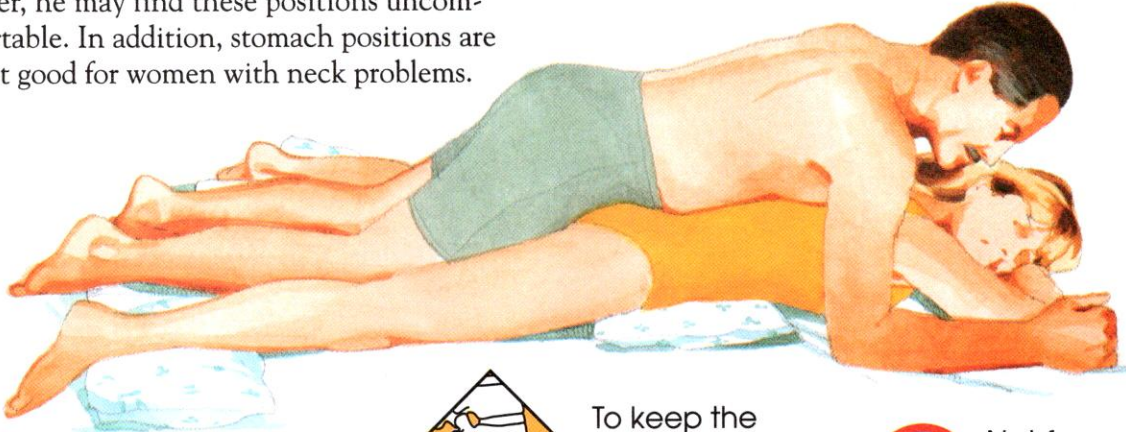
◆ Place a pillow under her top knee to keep the hip from dropping forward.

CHOOSING POSITIONS

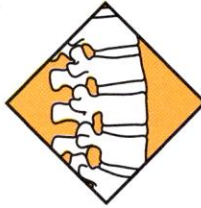
ON THE STOMACH

Stomach positions can work well if the woman is most comfortable in a neutral position or if either partner needs extension. If the man's back needs to be supported, however, he may find these positions uncomfortable. In addition, stomach positions are not good for women with neck problems.

- ◆ He supports his weight on his elbows and forearms.



- ◆ She can put a thin pillow under her ankles for comfort.



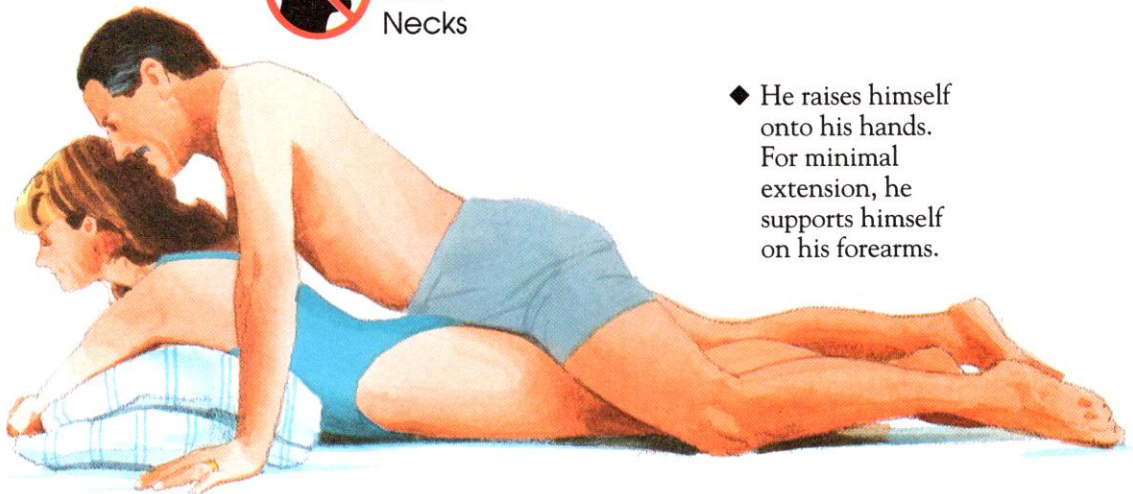
To keep the spine in neutral, she places a small pillow under her waist.



Not for Sore Necks



Not for Sore Necks



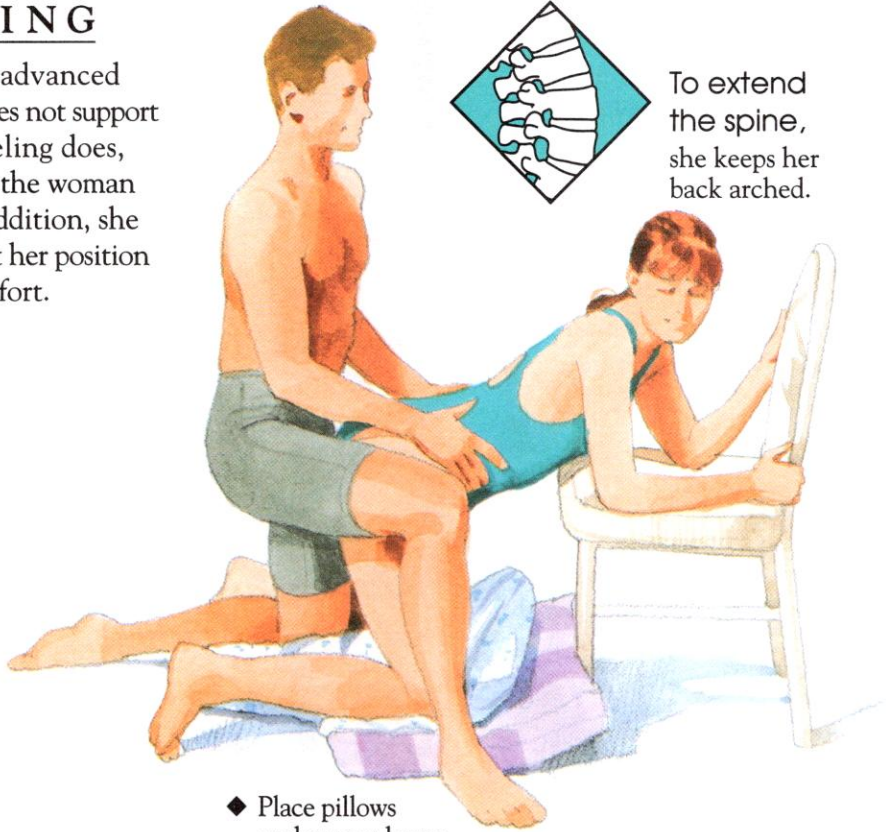
- ◆ He raises himself onto his hands. For minimal extension, he supports himself on his forearms.



To extend the spine, she places a pillow under her chest. For minimal extension, she can lie flat on her stomach without any pillows.

KNEELING

This is a more advanced position that does not support the back. Kneeling does, however, allow the woman to extend. In addition, she can easily adjust her position for greater comfort.

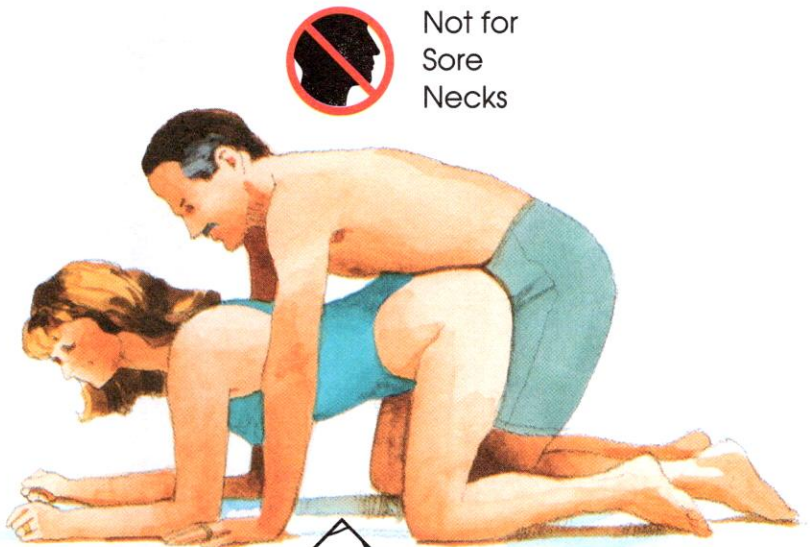


To extend the spine, she keeps her back arched.

◆ Place pillows under your knees for comfort.

ON HANDS AND KNEES

If the woman needs to extend and does not have a neck problem, having sex on hands and knees may be comfortable. Because it does not support the back, you may want to save this position until you're feeling better.



Not for Sore Necks

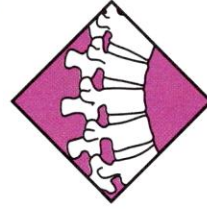
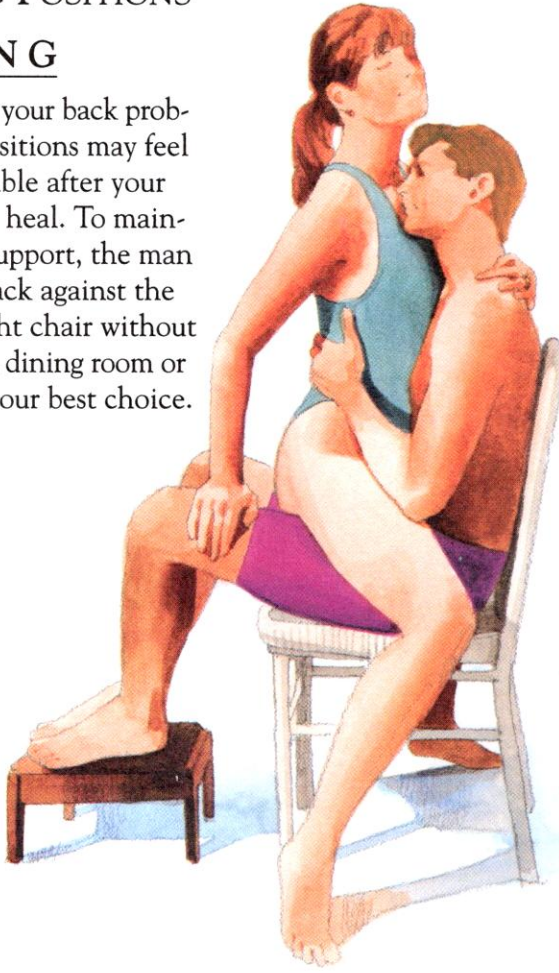


To extend the spine, she keeps her back arched.

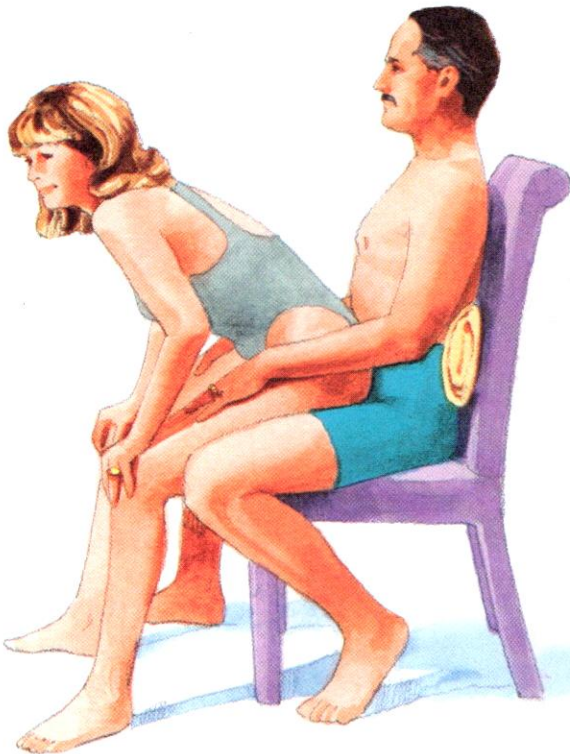
CHOOSING POSITIONS

SITTING

Depending on your back problem, sitting positions may feel most comfortable after your back begins to heal. To maintain the best support, the man sits with his back against the chair. A straight chair without arms, such as a dining room or desk chair, is your best choice.



To flex the spine, he raises both knees, supporting his feet on a stool or books.



To extend the spine, he supports his low back with a lumbar roll or a rolled towel.

WORKING AS PARTNERS

Identifying comfortable positions is important, but it's not the only thing that can make sex more enjoyable. If you both communicate your needs and work together to adapt as your back health changes, the two of you can renew and strengthen your sexual relationship.

Start Slowly

When returning to sex after back surgery or an injury, give yourselves time. A quick romp in the shower isn't your best plan of action right now. Instead, move slowly and keep your back supported as much as you can.

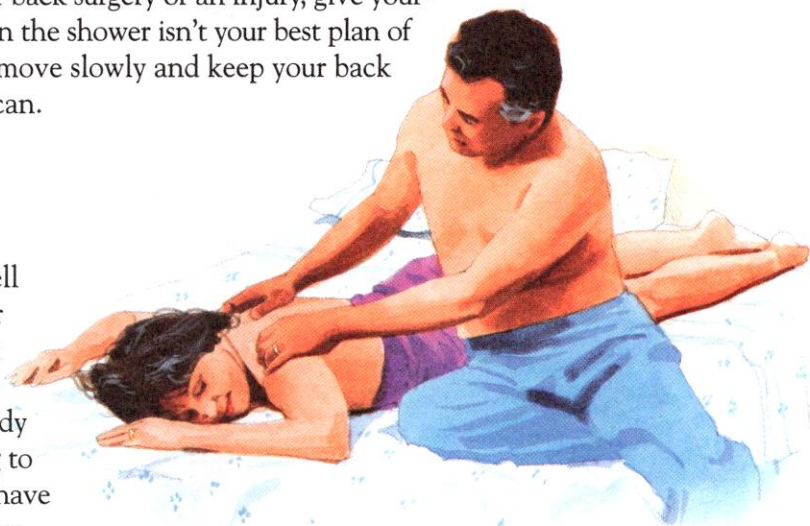
A Healthy Partner's Role

Touch can be healing as well as sensuous. Massage your partner's sore back to relax tight muscles and soothe the pain. If he or she is ready to try having sex, be willing to try new positions. You may have to move more than usual so your partner's back can remain supported. If pain is still a problem, share a warm bath and give yourselves credit for trying. You can look forward to more progress next time.

Tips for Comfort

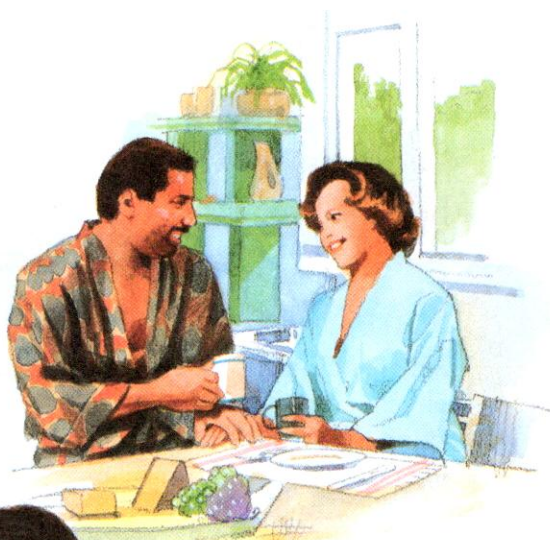
To save yourself from excess pain, follow the simple tips listed below.

- ◆ Gather supports, such as pillows and towel rolls, ahead of time.
- ◆ Use a bed with a mattress that is firm, yet has enough cushion to absorb your back's three natural curves.
- ◆ Don't have sex on a soft couch or in a standing position. Both strain the back.
- ◆ Have ice or a heating pad nearby, just in case you need to control a few aches afterward.



MORE COMFORT, LESS PAIN

Like many people, you may still feel back pain from time to time. But once you know which positions best support and protect your back, pain needn't keep you and your partner from having sex. In fact, continuing to use positions suited to your back problem may help keep the pain from returning.



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featuring **KRAMES**

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