

Treating the Herniated Disk

At the clinic, we see more clients with herniated disks than with any other back pain symptom. Many of them bring X-rays that show that the disk—a tough pad of tissue that acts as a cushion between vertebrae—has been squeezed by the bones until it comes into contact with a nerve. The disk is either bulging like a balloon that's being squeezed, or it actually ruptures, with its softer inner core material oozing out like a jelly doughnut leaking its filling. I look at the pictures and say, "Yes, that's definitely a herniated disk."

"The doctor wants to surgically remove the piece that's pressing on the nerve."

I nod and ask, "Don't you think your back was designed to use all of that disk?"

"But it's against the nerve."

"Why? How did it get there?" And since by that point we've discussed some of the basics of human biomechanics, I usually get this response:

"Muscles put it there."

"Right. And muscles can take it out of there."

There are five E-cises that are effective for mitigating musculoskeletal pain in the low back.

Total time: Twenty minutes.

Times a day: Once in the morning.

Duration: Do the exercises daily until pain abates for forty-eight hours, and then continue the menu for ten days before switching to the overall conditioning program in chapter 13. Don't be impatient. If your back has been hurting twenty-four hours a day, initial pain relief of an hour or two indicates progress. If you seem to be plateauing, increase the repetitions.

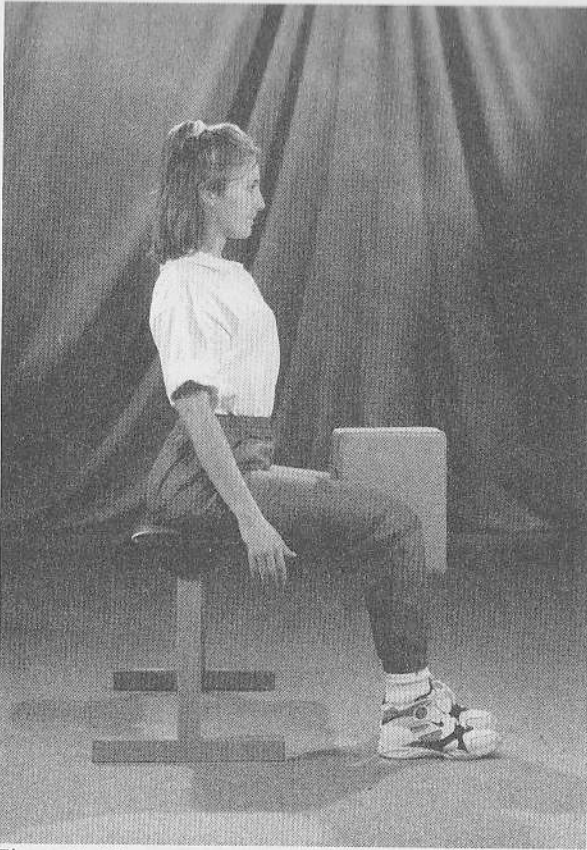


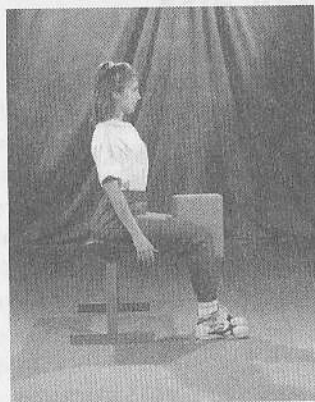
Figure 6-10

- SITTING KNEE
PILLOW SQUEEZES
(Figure 6-10)

Sit on the edge of a chair or bench, and arch your back by rolling your hips

forward. Pull your shoulders back, and make sure your knees and feet are in alignment with your hips. Relax your stomach muscles; let them hang. Place a pillow between your knees, and using your inner thighs, squeeze the pillow and release it gently. You may need to fold the pillow to give it thickness. Your feet stay parallel to each other; and don't let your stomach or upper back participate. Do four sets of ten repetitions. The abductor and adductor muscles are doing their primary assignment, instead of trying to operate as gait muscles.

- SITTING KNEE PILLOW SQUEEZES



This E-cise was introduced in chapter 6 (figure 6–10, page 94). Follow the instructions there, and make sure you sit right on the edge of the bench. Keep your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead. Do three sets of fifteen. Do the squeezes slowly and evenly on both sides.

This E-cise strengthens the hip's abductor/adductors to help pull the back out of flexion.

- STATIC BACK KNEE PILLOW SQUEEZES

(Figure 8–2)

Get into the Static Back position in chapter 5 (figure 5–5, page 70), and place a pillow between the knees. Using the inner thighs,

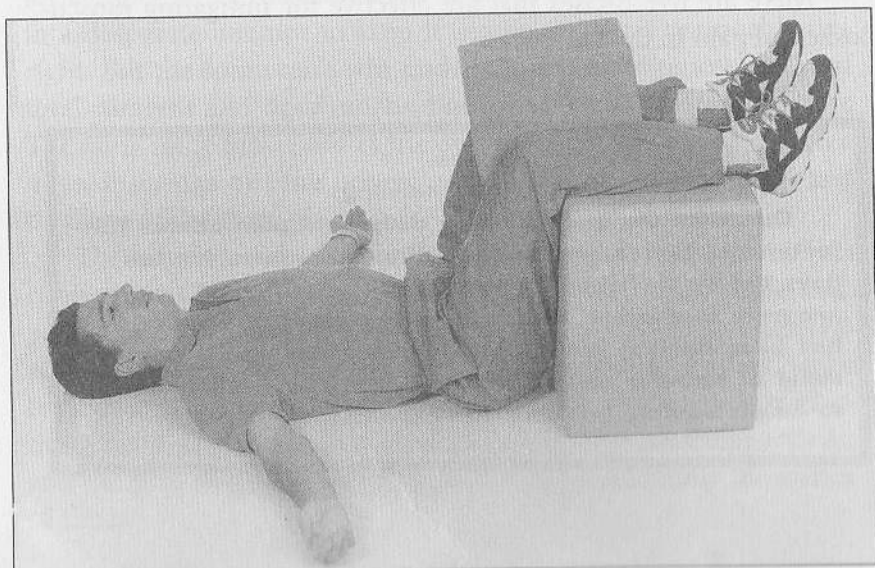


Figure 8–2

twenty-four hours. Once the pain is gone, continue with the menu for one week before switching to the overall conditioning program in chapter 13.

- FOOT CIRCLES

Follow the routine for Foot Circles in chapter 4 (figure 4-5, page 53). Be sure to circle both feet, even though the Achilles tendon pain is on only one side. Foot Circles remind the ankle of its design range of motion. Do not do the Point Flexes.

- STATIC BACK
(Figure 5-5)

Lie on your back, with both legs bent at right angles on a chair or block. Rest your hands on your stomach or the floor, below shoulder level, with palms up. Let the back settle into the floor.



Figure 5-5

squeeze the pillow and release evenly. The feet remain parallel to each other. Relax your stomach. Do three sets of fifteen.

This E-cise allies the adductor/abductors with the force of gravity and disengages the lower extremities.

- MODIFIED FLOOR BLOCK
(Figure 8-3)

Lie on your stomach with your forehead on the floor. Your feet should be pigeon-toed and the buttocks relaxed. Rest your elbows on blocks so that the arms and hands are in the “Don’t shoot, sheriff—I give up” position. Make sure your shoulders are level from right to left. Breathe deeply, and relax the upper body. Don’t press your arms into the blocks; let the chest and stomach fall into the floor, and that will cause the hips to tilt forward. Hold the position for six minutes. This E-cise disengages the shoulders.

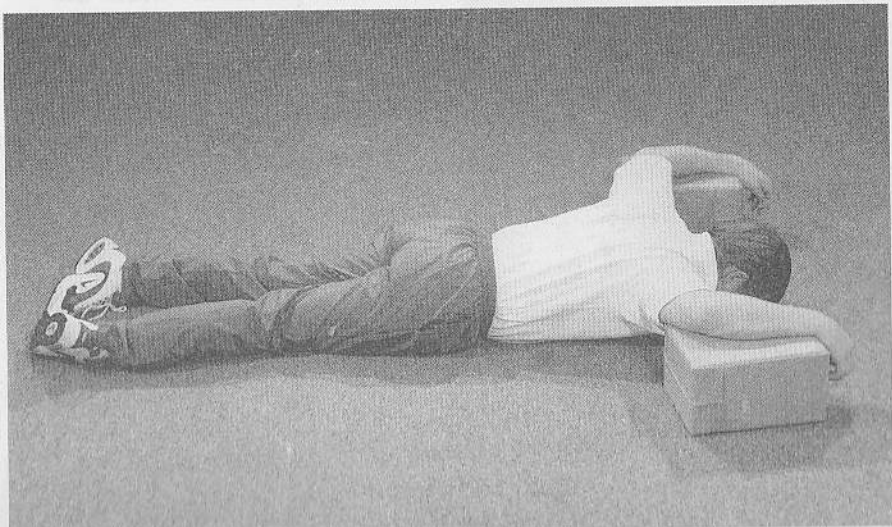
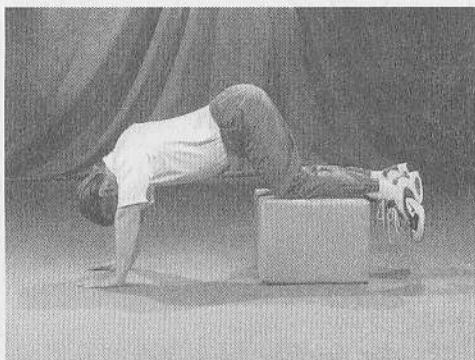


Figure 8-3



- **STATIC EXTENSION
(POSITION)**

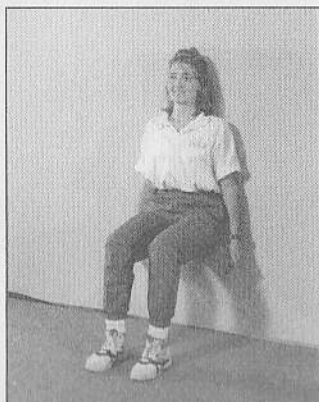
See chapter 4 (figure 4–7, page 56) for instructions on Static Extension, but make one important change: Do the E-cise on the floor rather than using

a block for elevation. Don't let Static Extension spook you: Generally, extreme flexion causes a herniated disk, and this E-cise promotes, as the name implies, extension, relieving the pressure on the disk. Make sure you come forward onto your hands so that the hips move in front of the knees. This will allow the back to sway and restore the missing lumbar arch. It helps to have someone watch to verify that your back is swaying and not flat—or worse, rounding. Your stomach muscles should be totally slack. Be assured that the body won't let you aggravate the herniation; pain would immediately short-circuit the procedure. Hold the position for one minute.

- **AIR BENCH**

See chapter 4 (figure 4–8, page 57) for instructions on Air Bench. Keep your shoulders and head against the wall throughout. Hold for one to two minutes.

This E-cise relinks the ankles, knees, and hips.



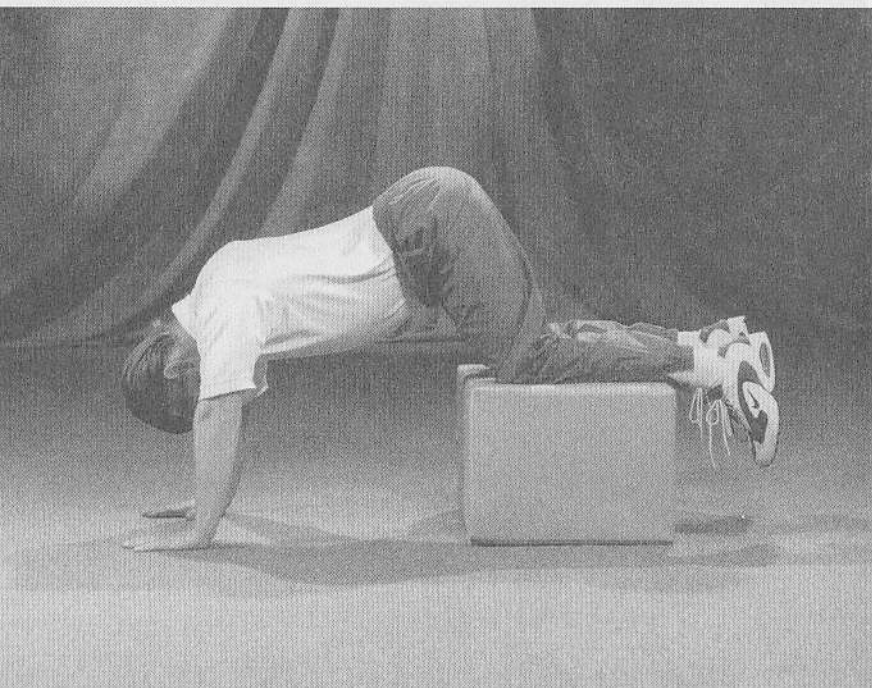


Figure 4-7

- **STATIC EXTENSION**
(Figure 4-7)

This E-cise tackles hip rotation. Hips that not only rotate but actually twist to the right or left disrupt knee and ankle function.

Kneel on a block or chair with hands on the floor under the shoulders. Let your back and head relax toward the floor and shoulder blades come together. Relax. There should be a pronounced arch in your back. Keep your elbows straight, and shift your hips forward six to eight inches so that they are not aligned with the knees. Hold for one to two minutes.

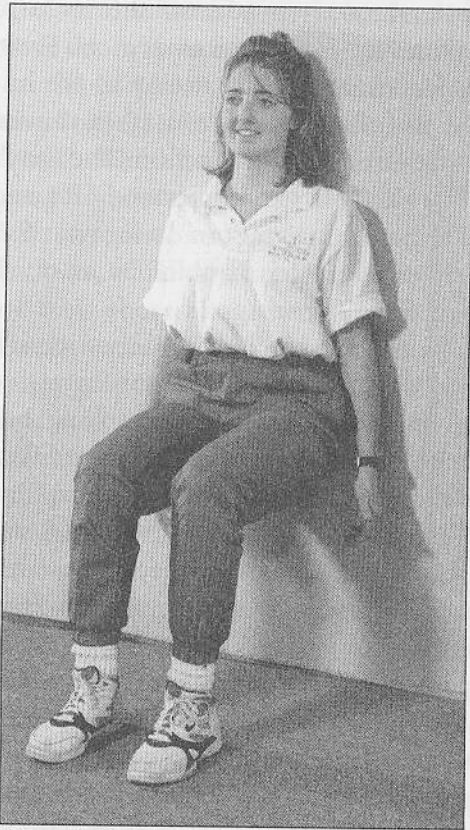


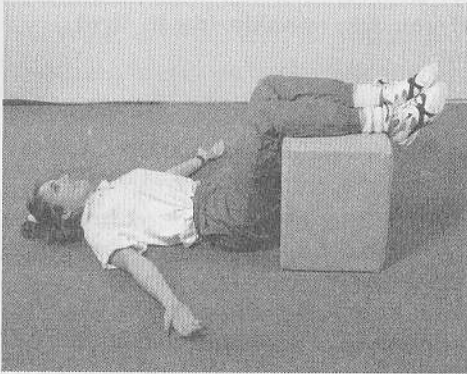
Figure 4-8

- AIR BENCH
(Figure 4-8)

This E-cise puts the hips, knees, and ankles simultaneously into extension while they are aligned and under load. The best way to get into this position is to stand with your back to the wall. Press your hips and the small of your back into it while walking the feet

forward and simultaneously sliding down into a sitting position. Stop when you've reached roughly a ninety-degree angle. The knees should be over the ankles, not the toes. (*You shouldn't be able to see the toes.*) If you feel pain in the kneecaps, raise your body up the wall to relieve the pressure. Press the low back and midback against the wall to feel the quadriceps working along the top of the thigh. Hold for one to three minutes. This E-cise can be a bit of a struggle, but you do not have to be ultrafit to do it. If you feel like it is too much of a workout, then try it for only a few seconds and build up to one minute. Walk around for a minute after this E-cise.

When the pain subsides, which should occur after a week of doing the above routine, add the following E-cises:



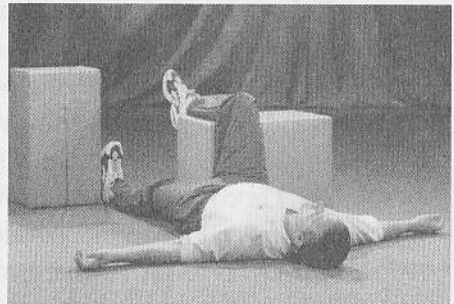
• **STATIC BACK**

The instructions for Static Back are in chapter 5 (figure 5–5, page 70). Don't overdo this one: After an hour it has diminishing returns. I know it feels

good, but it's counterproductive to spend all morning or afternoon in Static Back. Inactivity will take a toll. Hold for only five to ten minutes. Static Back uses gravity to get the structures back on the same plane, but they also must have vertical loading.

• **SUPINE GROIN STRETCH**

The instructions for Supine Groin Stretch are also in chapter 5 (figure 5–7, page 72). The problem here is underdoing it. Give the E-cise plenty of time to work. Hold for at least ten minutes per side. The groin muscles are powerful, and it takes time to persuade them to let go.



• **AIR BENCH (SECOND SET)**

See the first set of E-cises on the previous page.

- SUPINE GROIN STRETCH

(Figure 5-7)

This E-cise tames the powerful muscles that run along the inside of your thighs. Lie on your back with one leg resting on a block or chair, the knee bent at a ninety-degree angle, while the other leg is extended straight out and resting on the floor. Make sure that both legs are aligned with the hips and shoulders. The foot of the extended leg should be propped upright to prevent it from rolling to one side. Relax in this position for at least ten minutes, then switch sides.

An alternative way to time this E-cise is to use the thigh test. Contract the thigh of the extended leg, and determine where you feel the strongest part of the contraction. Initially it will be near the knee. As the stretch continues, do the test contractions every

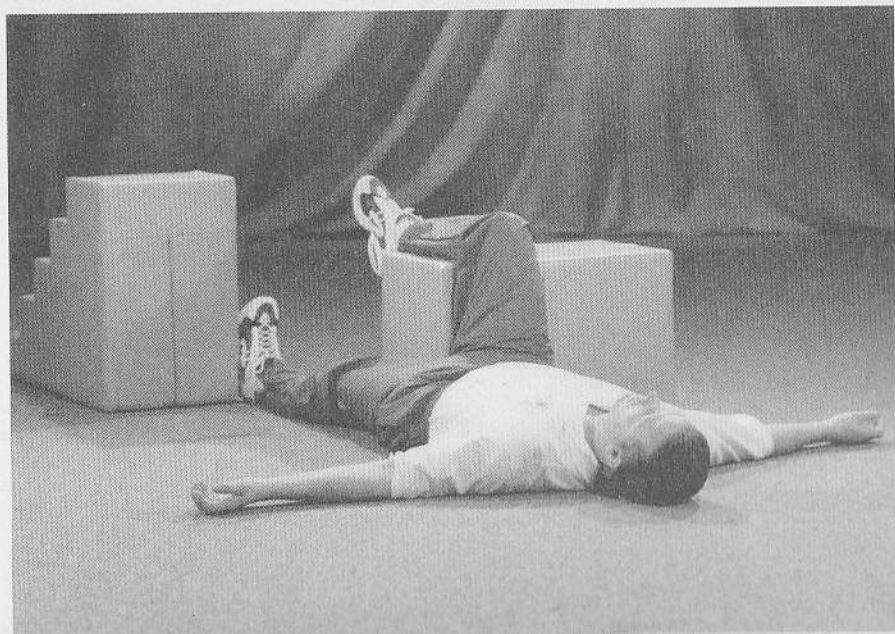


Figure 5-7