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- ✓ Ringing ears
- ✓ Fall allergies
- ✓ Back spasms
- ✓ Bladder problems

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"I feel like I've

Jennifer Papastephanou, 49, struggled with back spasms for years—until she found the gentle exercise that healed her back *and* helped her shed 11 inches!

Oh no, what was that?! Jennifer Papastephanou thought, after hearing a crash from the room where her two young sons were playing. "I stood up to rush in there, but had a severe muscle spasm in my back and I couldn't move. I had to ask my daughter, the eldest, to check on the boys. Thankfully they were okay. But I started to worry, *What if my back goes out again and no one is here to help me?*"

Battling constant pain

"I had struggled with back spasms since I was in my 20s, but after I had my children, the problem worsened and made it tough to get through the day. I enjoyed taking my kids on adventures, but the discomfort made me feel irritable. Even more frustrating: Although my kids walked slowly, I still couldn't keep up.

"It became nearly impossible to do everyday chores like clean, cook or even get the newspaper. When I walked out my front door, I'd have to consciously think about how to bend down so I wouldn't put more pressure on my back and trigger a spasm.

"Although I'm a registered dietitian, nutritionist and certified diabetes educator, things got so bad that my diet suffered. I'd often find myself eating when I wasn't hungry because a hit of sugar would comfort me when I was hurting."

How strengthening the core

Nearly 80% of adults experience lower-back muscle spasms at some point in their lives. But spasms don't necessarily signal a serious problem. "Most of the time," says Patrick Roth, M.D., author of *The End of Back Pain*, "the underlying trigger for a muscle spasm is a relatively minor looseness in the spine—the body's reaction is more painful than the actual injury."

That's why it can be easy to heal the underlying trigger and end spasms. The key: strengthening the *posterior core*, a set of deep back muscles that we don't use regularly. "All the parts of the core are connected and create an inner belt," explains Dr. Roth. "But we tend to underdevelop our posterior core." Simple exercises that focus on strengthening these muscles tighten our inner belt, stabilizing the looseness that leads to spasms.

To eliminate muscle spasms, follow Jennifer Papastephanou's lead and complete these three moves four times per week.

Jennifer Papastephanou, Lutherville, MD

got my life back!"

"Despite the pain, I tried my best to exercise and stay active, but that only made the problem worse. After a workout, I always felt wiped out, almost like I had the flu—and it made my back feel worse. One time, I felt that familiar sharp twinge in a spinning class. I tried to continue class, but the pain was too intense, so I walked out.

"For relief, I tried acupuncture and physical therapy and I saw a chiropractor. Although the treatments helped, they were expensive and took away from time with my kids—plus they didn't offer sustained relief. Desperate for answers, I made an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon, but he said major back surgery wouldn't be worth the risk in my case. I knew I needed a long-term solution, but I didn't know where to turn.

Relief at last!

"I was having lunch with a friend when I had my big *aha!* moment. She didn't exercise, but she was long and lean and had the most beautiful posture—like

a ballet dancer. She always stood up straight and walked perfectly and never complained about back pain. I started to wonder if correcting my posture would help me.

"That day, I went home and did a Google search on posture and I stumbled upon T-Tapp (T-Tapp.com), a low-impact exercise program that focuses on body alignment, building lean muscle and restoring back function.

"At first, I wasn't sure it would actually work because there are so many programs that make big promises, but it had so many positive reviews that I figured it was worth a try.

"I purchased the *Basic Workout Plus* and *Step Away the Inches* videos and did the workouts three to four times a week for 15 to 20 minutes a day. I learned how to activate muscles I never used before, like my abdominals, which are important for back strength. I learned how to stand properly and pull my abdominal muscles in and up,

which made me look instantly slimmer. The stretches also released the tension in my back.

"The workouts didn't hurt, and unlike with past exercise attempts, this didn't make me feel like I had the flu. I only felt a tingle in my muscles as they worked. Best of all, I had more energy than ever—my 3 PM slump was gone.

"Within two weeks, I had less discomfort, and by four weeks, I had no more spasms! It became more automatic to sit and stand tall, and I lost more than 11 inches throughout my body. My mood, stamina and focus soared. I couldn't believe such a simple workout could make such a big difference!"

"Now instead of letting a bad back sideline me from time with my family, I'm up for anything. Recently I chaperoned my daughter's marching band performance in Disney World and walked 22,000 steps every day for three days. I have my life back!"

—as told to Julie Revelant

"I couldn't believe such a simple workout could make such a big difference!"

ENDS BACK PROBLEMS

◀ Twist Stretch

This move strengthens the posterior core. **TO DO:** With knees bent, bring your hands together at chest level. Twist to the left while keeping your knees bent and facing forward (shown). Next, bend toward your left foot and stretch clasped hands toward the floor; slowly roll up. Repeat on the right side. That's 1 rep; do 4.

Reach, Scoop, Stretch ▶

This builds the posterior core muscles and stretches the back to ease stiffness. **TO DO:** With feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent, stretch your right hand overhead and tilt your torso to the left; hold for 5 counts. Repeat to the right. That's 1 rep; do 4.

I Dream of Jeannie Squats ▼

Engaging the *gluteus maximus* and *transverse abdominis*, this move builds the posterior core.

TO DO: Stand with your feet hip-width apart, keeping your weight in your heels. Cross your arms and lower into a squat, then curve your back slightly (shown); hold for 2 counts. Next, arch your back slightly; hold for 2 counts. That's 1 rep; do 4.

