

MANAGING CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN THROUGH EXERCISE

In partnership with POTENTRx

May 2015

What is Chronic Low Back Pain?

Chronic low back pain is pain that persists for 12 weeks or longer, even after an initial injury or underlying cause of acute low back pain has been treated. This may cause an intolerance to physical activity, lower levels of physical fitness and function, and avoidance of physical activity which leads to a sedentary lifestyle.

Know Your Facts!

Q: What are causes of low back pain?

A: Low back pain is usually caused by mechanical issues such as: sprains and strains, intervertebral disc degeneration, herniated or ruptured discs, radiculopathy (nerve pain), sciatica, spondylolisthesis, a traumatic injury, spinal stenosis, and skeletal irregularities.

Q: How common is low back pain?

A: 80% of adults will experience low back pain at some point in their lives and 20% of those people will develop chronic low back pain.

Q: How is low back pain treated?

A: Common treatments include: hot or cold packs, physical activity, strengthening exercises, physical therapy, medications, and surgery when all else fails.

Q: What are non-mechanical causes of low back pain?

A: Some serious, but rare underlying conditions can cause low back pain. These include: infections, tumors, ruptured discs, abdominal aortic aneurysms (blood vessels become abnormally enlarged increasing risk for rupture), and kidney stones. Other underlying conditions that predispose people to back pain include: inflammatory diseases of the joints, endometriosis, and fibromyalgia.

Q: Is there anything I can do to manage low back pain aside from taking medication?

A: Yes! There are many modifiable risk factors that contribute to chronic low back pain. Please refer to the reverse side for lifestyle changes that can help to relieve chronic low back pain.

Low back pain is the most common cause of job-related disability and one of the leading contributors of missed work days.

NINDS, 2014





What Can Lifestyle Changes Do For Chronic Low Back Pain?

There are many proven and recommended lifestyle changes to manage low back pain—altering activities, losing weight, practicing good posture, avoiding tobacco, managing stress, and modifying your environment are all ways to manage low back pain. Altering activities such as: limiting the amount of bed rest, which can weaken support muscles; staying active and avoiding sitting or standing for long periods; avoiding lifting heavy objects; and considering changing jobs if your job is labor intensive. Losing weight will take some strain off of your spine and back muscles. Practicing good posture can decrease pressure on your lower back. Smoking may contribute to spinal disc degeneration. Managing stress can decrease muscle tension. Modifying your environment includes: finding the right mattress, not wearing high-heeled shoes, using a stool to bring your knees above your hips if you have to sit for long periods of time, avoid having objects in back pockets while sitting, using lumbar support like a pillow when sitting, and not sleeping on your stomach; instead sleep on your side or back with a pillow in between your legs.

Factors of Chronic Low Back Pain

There is no one, definite cause of chronic low back pain, but the following are known to increase risk for chronic low back pain:

Modifiable Risk Factors

Fitness level, being overweight, and labor intensive occupation.

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors

Age, genetics, anxiety and depression (*can be treated!).

What Can Exercise Do For Chronic Low Back Pain?

Core stability and strengthening exercises along with stretching have shown to decrease low back pain, as well as increase function and quality of life. It is recommended to do these exercises and stretching 5 times a week. Ask our exercise physiologists for core exercises and stretches that are suitable for you.

