

Backpain

M.Mahmud et al. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (2000) Vol. 42 #12. p 1178.

A study of 98 Workers' Compensation claims for back pain. These were first time claims, with no serious co-morbidity. Records of health care usage were analysed against duration of absence from work.

Length of disability was correlated with level of physical demand at work even after correction for severity of injury.

Use of X ray and MRI scans indicated a poor prognosis even after correction for severity of injury.

Comment

Disability seems to be correlated with activity intolerance as opposed to degree of injury. Use of MRI and X ray seems to cause delayed return to work, possibly because of the high rate of abnormalities that will be detected and will convince the patient of the need for further medical intervention. Spinal abnormalities are very common and not diagnostic of harm.

Rehabilitation of back pain cases should concentrate on activity buildup, and may require temporary job modification. There is no justification for X-rays or MRI scans unless serious pathology is suspected.

