

Low Back Pain

JM Fritz et al. Pain. October (2001) Vol.94 #1 p 7.

A study of the prognostic value of fear avoidance beliefs in low back pain (LBP).

Many cases with LBP are reluctant to test the boundaries of movement and activity for fear of serious tissue damage. Research has shown that such damage is extremely unlikely and where it is likely the risk is easily detected by examination. Research also shows that fullest recovery is achieved soonest by a rapid return to normal activities.

The question addressed in this research is whether fear avoidance beliefs are more predictive of disability, where it might be supposed that pain severity might be the dominant factor (if tissue damage was really the issue).

78 cases reported as having work-related LBP of less than 3 weeks took part in the study.

Pain, impairment, disability, depression were measured at baseline (i.e. within 3 weeks of the "injury"). A fear avoidance beliefs (FAB) questionnaire (focussing on work and physical activity) was used.

FAB was predictive of 4 week disability and work status regardless of other baseline scores and type of therapy delivered.

However, FAB scores were also correlated with initial pain and disability.

Comment

The authors focus on the success of the FAB score in predicting outcome at 4 weeks (at up to 7 weeks post event). However, the small extent of correlation with initial severity of pain and disability suggests it is not 100% predictive.

The suggestion is that intervention to overcome unwarranted fear of movement would be effective in reducing short-term disability.

