

Back Pain

AFMannion et al. Spine. April (2001) Vol. 26 #8 p 897

To determine whether the improvements (pain and disability) produced by active rehabilitation can be explained by improved muscle tone. If so, the inference may be that pain and disability is linked to an identifiable change/weakness in physiology. Patients often seek a physical explanation for their predicament.

The study was remarkable for the degree of investigation of muscle tone and the use of standard tests of pain and disability. It was less convincing on the selection of appropriate controls.

The study compared the results following random assignment to:

- 1) active physio or
- 2) muscle reconditioning or
- 3) aerobics

For 3 months.

Pain, Psychological distress, fear-avoidance beliefs, efficacy in coping were moderately good predictors of disability prior to therapy.

Improvements in strength and endurance were made in all three treatments, but these were unrelated to improvements in ability or reductions in pain.

Comment

Disability related to back pain would appear not to be function of changes to muscle strength or endurance (at least for the muscles studied here). The main effect of the therapy appears to be that it gets people accustomed to activity in spite of continuing pain. However, the participants in this study were all volunteers and may therefore represent the more motivated end of the spectrum.

