



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Physical Therapy for Low Back Pain

Low back pain is one of the most common injuries reported by adults. About 80 percent of adults experience low back pain at some point in their lifetimes. It is also the most common cause of job-related disability and a leading contributor to missed work days. In a large survey, more than a quarter of adults reported experiencing low back pain during the past 3 months. The majority of acute low back pain is mechanical in nature. This means that there is a disruption in the way the structures within the back (vertebrae, muscle, intervertebral discs and nerves) fit together and move. [1]

By determining the cause of a patient's low back pain, physical therapists get to the source of the problem and develop an individualized treatment plan to alleviate the symptoms. Treatment plans typically consist of a combination of manual therapy techniques, patient-specific exercise programs, modalities such as heat or ice and patient education regarding specific factors that lead to back injury. In general, the goals of physical therapy include decreasing pain, increasing overall function, and providing the patient with education to prevent re-injury. [2]

A 2015 research study was conducted to evaluate the impact of early and guideline adherent physical therapy for low back pain on utilization and costs within the Military Health System (MHS). The study considered 753,450 patients with a primary care visit for LBP between the ages of 18–60 years old. Of this sample, 16.3% (n = 122,723) of patients utilized physical therapy, with 24.0% (n = 17,175) of this smaller sample receiving early,

guideline adherent physical therapy treatment. The study found that early referral to guideline adherent physical therapy was associated with significantly lower healthcare utilization and 60% lower overall costs [3]. This suggests that physical therapy can be an effective form of primary treatment for low back pain, and can reduce lost work and recreation time due to injury. While low back pain is a common problem, it doesn't have to be a common part of everyday life. Don't just focus on the symptoms, see your physical therapist to help find the cause of your low back pain and fix the issue.

SOURCES: [1] "Low Back Pain Fact Sheet." Ninds.nih.gov. 10 May 2017. <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Fact-Sheets/Low-Back-Pain-Fact-Sheet> (02 June 2018). [2] "Most Americans Live with Low Back Pain – and Don't Seek Treatment. APTA reveals survey results and relief strategies for low back pain." APTA.org. 14 April 2012. <http://www.apta.org/Media/Releases/Consumer/2012/4/4/> (01 June 2018). [3] "Implications of early and guideline adherent physical therapy for low back pain on utilization and costs." DOI.org. 9 April 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-015-0830-3> (02 June 2018).