

Suffering From Low Back Pain?

Low back pain is a common cause of disability for many Americans especially those in the adult community as a result of abnormal stresses on the body with activities such as lifting and carrying heavy objects, shoveling snow in the winter months and slips and falls. It is known that 80% of the American population will suffer from low back pain during the course of their lives. If you or a family member is suffering from low back pain, this condition can be treated with physical therapy by a licensed physical therapist.

Take Mary Jane for example, she comes into the clinic complaining of low back pain after sitting in her chair at work for 30 minutes while typing on the computer. Mary Jane reports that once she stands up and starts walking around, the pain disappears only to return again once resuming a sitting position. After taking a subjective history on Mary Jane, the physical therapist evaluates her sitting posture and then has her stand up to evaluate her range of motion to see how far she can bend forward, backward, side to side and twisting at the back. As Mary Jane performs these movements, she reports that she does not experience any pain. The therapist then has Mary Jane perform repetitive movements of her lower back to determine if repeated stress causes an onset of pain. Again Mary Jane reports that she does not have any lower back pain. After completing an entire evaluation, the only positive findings that reproduced Mary Jane's lower back pain was the sitting for 30 minutes. Treatment for Mary Jane would consist of correcting her sitting posture by providing lumbar support to eliminate the abnormal stress on her spine that contributed to her pain.

Imagine the same patient who experiences lower back pain while sitting at work, however her pain remains even after standing up and walking around. The only way this patient has any relief from her lower back pain is after walking for 10-15 minutes. The physical therapist performs the same, however Mary Jane's pain increases with repetitive forward bending and decreases with repetitive backward bending. After completing a full evaluation, the physical therapist determines that Mary Jane's pain should be treated by having the patient perform exercises consisting of repetitive backward bending exercises and to avoid repetitive forward bending activities until her lower back pain subsides. After her symptoms of lower back pain are eliminated, the physical therapist would gradually re-introduce forward bending activities into Mary Jane's exercises. Now take the same patient, however when she performs repetitive movements, her lower back pain decreased with repetitive forward bending and remain unchanged with repetitive backward bending. As a result the physical therapist would determine that Mary Jane's pain in this instant is a result of tight structures in the lumbar spine and would therefore, provide her with exercises to stretch the involved structures.

There are many causes of lower back pain; however treatment will vary depending upon the presentation of symptoms as described by the patient and on the evaluation skills of the physical therapist as determined by a physical therapy examination. There are preventative measures a person can take to avoid injury to the lumbar spine. It is always important to maintain good posture, for example avoiding sitting in a slouched position. Also when performing any lifting or bending activities, it is important to bend at the

knees into a squatting position and lift with the legs, not your lower back. As well as to maintain the object you are lifting and carrying close to the body and not with outstretched arms.

Physical therapy can effectively treat lower back pain with treatments consisting of stretching and strengthening of identified structures, postural education, joint mobilization and soft tissue work, education in proper body mechanics, and stabilization exercises. If you are experiencing lower back pain and would like to receive treatment, follow up with your medical doctor and see if physical therapy would be right for you.