

How to Prevent and Treat Lower Back Pain

Written by Ash Ariffin

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From my most recent and first experience of lower back pain, I have scoured over the internet and did an online research on it. Thus, I have decided to write an article based on my research and share it with the world. Lower back pain is no joke to be messed around with. It is serious, considering, it can make you bedridden and unable to move or do anything.

Lower back pain is one of the most common causes of job-related disability and the reason why some people miss their work. It is also the most common neurological ailment, second to headache. In a matter of fact, most adults at some point will experience lower back pain.

For some people who are considered fortunate, pain in the lower back may be resolved by itself or with some aid of medication within two to four weeks. Still, there are some cases of lower back pain that last for more than a few weeks. These cases are referred to as “chronic” and “progressive”, meaning that it can only grow worse over time.

60% – 80% of the mentioned cases involving patients who suffer their first experience of lower back pain may experience it again within one year.

Current research shows that there are certain muscles in the back that work to stabilise the spine. When the back or the spine suffers an injury, these muscles are inactively inhibited or shutdown. Worse is these muscles do not instinctively recover and this is true even if the patients do not feel any more pain and are able to return to normal daily activity levels.

Due to the inhibition of these muscles which are called lumbar multifidi and the transversus abdominus muscles, lower back pain occurs. To counter this, there are steps that you can take to prevent the same thing from recurring.

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Lower Back Pain and Physical Therapy

A series of physical therapy exercise is one of the ways to prevent the inhibition of the lumbar multifidi and transversus abdominus muscle.

These physical therapy exercises may range from back stabilisation exercise to muscle strength development and several varieties of techniques which are designed to strengthen the muscles of the lower back and keep the spine healthy.

On top of that, a physical therapist may also recommend some methods like heat therapy, ultrasound, massage, mobilisation, acupuncture and education on body posture and mechanics in order not to let lower back pain from recurring.

Before we start on learning how lower back pain is treated through physical therapy, it is important that we understand what actually causes the pain on the lower back.

Causes of Lower Back Pain

There are many different types of back pain but the most common of it all is lower back pain. The reason for this is simple. We carry most of our weight in the lower back. Hence, it is highly likely that we would suffer pain in that area.

There is no direct or to the point explanation to the cause of lower back pain. At times, the causes of it are so complex that is near impossible to pinpoint to just a single cause.

Nonetheless, physical therapists and healthcare professionals have observed that lower back pain are often resulting from strained back muscles and ligaments due to one or more of the following activities.

- Improper body posture
- Lifting or carrying heavy items
- Sudden uncomfortable movement
- Muscle contraction
- Anxiety or stress

All of us could be guilty of any of the above activities and we may not suffer or experience any back pains now but it is likely that we might suffer from it as we get older and the degree of inhibition of the back muscles, resulting from these activities increases, back pain becomes a very distinct possibility.

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To add icing to the cake, lower back pain may also result from specific condition. For example:

- **Herniated Disk** - (When the disk material presses on a nerve)
- **Sciatica** - (When a herniated disk presses on the sciatic nerve. The condition causes sharp, shooting pain through the buttocks and the back of the leg.)
- **Spinal Stenosis** - (When the space around the spinal cord and nerve roots becomes narrow. This is caused by arthritis and bone overgrowth, the pain resulting from when a nerve gets pinched in the narrow space.)
- **Spondylosis** - (A type of arthritis affecting the spine due to degenerative changes brought on by aging)
- **Spondylolisthesis** - (When one vertebra in the spinal column slips forward over another)

Treatment for Lower Back Pain

Several factors that treatment of the lower back pain depends on include the specific type of lower back pain, whether it is chronic or acute and the supposed cause.

For example, acute lower back pain is commonly treated with pain killer drugs such as analgesics or some form of exercises that can assist and help relax the affected muscle groups.

However, for chronic back pain or one that lasts for more than two weeks and it is progressive pain that may be caused by some underlying condition, the treatment plan for these cases may consists or includes resolving the underlying condition to treat the back pain.

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Physical Therapy Exercise for Lower Back Pain

One of the most common methods of treating lower back pain is Physical Therapy Exercise. A general theory states that if you remain active, you will remain healthy. Due to this theory, many home remedies for lower back pain consist of exercise. This is true for most cases.

On the other hand, the purpose of this article and the exercises featured here will be the ones that are practised by physical therapists to treat patients with lower back pain.

In general, physical therapy exercises for lower back pain includes a set of stretching exercises, strengthening exercises and low impact aerobics. Read through the lists below on the details of these exercises.

1) Stretching

The composition of the back of a person includes a set of spinal column and adjoining muscles, ligaments and tendons. They are designed to move in harmony with each other so that any limitation within the range of motion or movement in any of these components of the back will result in back pain.

Specific target motive on stretching treatment for lower back pain is the soft tissues such as the adjoining muscles, ligaments and tendons which are found at the back of a person and around the spine. With stretching, soft tissues and the spine are mobilised. Hence, increasing the motion and relieving the pain.

There are many forms of stretching exercises practised by physical therapists. One of them is Hamstring Stretching Exercise which helps to relax tight hamstrings which is a common symptom of lower back pain. This exercise is believed to help decrease the intensity of lower back pain for patients.

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2) Strengthening

Two forms of strengthening and lower back pain relief exercises that are generally used by physical therapists usually depend on the specific condition of the patient. The two forms of exercises are “**McKenzie**” and “**Dynamic Lumbar Stabilisation**” exercises. On the other hand, these two forms of strengthening exercises may also be combined if the therapist finds it appropriate to do it.

- **McKenzie Exercises**

It is named after a physical therapist in New Zealand, McKenzie exercises are mainly extension exercises that assist in reducing pain generated from the disc space and also to reduce the symptoms of herniated disc by reducing pressure on the nerve root.

McKenzie exercises should be done frequently for acute lower back pain. At least once every two hours. On top of that, it is recommended that patients are to avoid flexing their spine while doing the exercise.

- **Dynamic Lumbar Stabilisation Exercises**

For this exercise technique, the first thing that a physical therapist will do is that he/she will look for the patient’s “**Neutral Spine**”. This refers to the position that the patient feels the most comfortable to be in.

After this is done, the back muscles are then exercised in order to make the spine to stay in the particular position.

By doing these exercises on a regular basis, it can assist in helping to strengthen the back muscles and keep the spine in a well position manner.

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3) Low Impact Aerobic Exercises

The objective of low impact aerobic exercise is to assist the back get back into shape. Patients undergoing this through low impact aerobic exercise will have lesser experience of lower back pain.

On top of that, whenever lower back pain occurs, the pain will be less likely intense and will last for a short period.

Other benefit of low impact aerobic exercise is that patients tend to stay functional. They are able to continue with their regular work and move forward with recreational activities. In contrast, patients who do not do low impact aerobics exercises are likely to experience the gradual loss of their functional abilities.

To achieve the desired results from low impact aerobic exercises, it should be done continuously. Heart rate will increase and keep it elevated as well as increasing the production of “endorphins”, a pain fighting hormones released by the body.

Below is the list of examples of low impact aerobic exercises that may reduce lower back pain:

- **Walking**

Walking is one of the simplest forms of aerobic exercises and it is generally believed as very gentle on the back. To achieve maximum benefit from walking as a form of low impact aerobic exercise, walk three to five kilometres, three times per week.

- **Stationary Bicycling**

This type of aerobic exercise is much less painful on the back since there is significantly lower impact produced. This is good for patients with lower back pain and walking might be too painful for them.

- **Water Therapy**

Water Therapy is sometimes known as Aqua Therapy. This therapy is done by simply doing exercise in the water. Water acts as a medium and produces a buoyancy effect on the body and it is effectively conditioning at the same time, stress on the back is reduced.