

Challenging Back Pain Myths

- ***Changing beliefs/attitudes about LBP reduces disability and sick leave in a cost-effective manner***
- ***Physiotherapy combined with education about pain significantly reduces pain and disability***
- ***Advice to rest in bed is less effective than advice to stay active***

Low Back Pain (LBP) is a huge cause of disability worldwide⁶. The best approaches to managing LBP often contrast with the beliefs of the public and international research has shown that educating people about LBP can be very effective in reducing LBP and the related costs on society. To challenge some of the common myths and to give the public a greater understanding of how to manage LBP, the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP) have published ***Challenging Back Pain Myths*** as part of their annual Move4Health campaign. (To download the information leaflet and information brochure please see www.move4health.ie)

Launching ***Challenging Back Pain Myths***, Kieran O’Sullivan, Chairperson of the 2011 Move4Health Campaign, said “Modifying the beliefs and attitudes of people with LBP is very effective. Research has shown that changing beliefs and attitudes about LBP reduces disability and sick leave in a cost-effective manner, with obvious advantages for the person themselves, as well as wider society. Education about what is really occurring in back pain, when combined with Physiotherapy, significantly reduces pain and disability.”

Speaking about the campaign: Dr. Paul Murphy Consultant Pain Specialist, St. Vincent’s Private Hospital, said: “The Move4Health campaign is an important initiative in dispelling some of the unhelpful myths surrounding back pain. In particular, encouraging patients to remain physically active is critically important in facilitating recovery”.

LBP is a common problem which affects the quality of life of many people. It is now clear that the beliefs of people with LBP can have a major effect on their prognosis. LBP patients who are most fearful about their future LBP⁷, who rest excessively^{5,8-11}, who cannot cope with, or control their pain¹², or who believe there is a serious structural problem in their back¹³ are at greater risk of developing chronic LBP. These are understandable concerns when one considers common perceptions about LBP. The good news is that these beliefs are incorrect and can be changed. International research shows that improving beliefs about LBP can make a big difference to people with LBP^{1-4,14}.

Kieran continued: “If attempts to change beliefs about LBP are confined to direct interactions with LBP patients, progress will be slow. By considering the factors that influence LBP beliefs, these beliefs can be changed. Previous international research has demonstrated that public health interventions designed to alter beliefs about LBP can be very effective in changing back beliefs. For example, after such an approach members of the public are more likely to correctly believe that LBP does not necessarily need rest or require long periods of time off work. Critically, this is also associated with a clear decline in disability and the costs of compensation.”

Speaking about the ISCP campaign: Neil O'Connell, Physiotherapy Lecturer, Brunel University, UK said: "No painful complaint is more saddled with unhelpful myths than back pain and the persistence of these myths can impair recovery and promote unnecessary suffering and disability. The Move4Health campaign by the ISCP is attacking some of these myths head-on and is a crucial step towards empowering people with back pain to make better decisions."

Mr. O'Sullivan continued: "**Challenging Back Pain Myths** hopes to address some of the key myths of back pain, so that people with LBP can live a more fulfilled life. Considering the multiple benefits of exercise in the prevention and management of conditions such as heart disease and stroke¹⁵, certain types of cancer¹⁶, as well as disorders such as anxiety and depression¹⁷ it is important for the general public to maintain appropriate levels of physical activity. Now that it is clear that exercise is safe and effective in the management of LBP, people with LBP should no longer be fearful of exercise, and be able to reap the benefits of exercise."

ENDS

Notes to Editor:

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Challenging Pack Pain Myths will be available at a series of public meetings which are being organised throughout the country during April and May where a Chartered Physiotherapist will be in attendance to answer any questions on LBP.

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