

New Evidence for Back Pain Sufferers

By Dr. Connie D'Astolfo, DC, PhD (candidate)

The literature is rich in high quality data and evidence to support a multi-disciplinary team approach to the management of back pain. In fact, persistent or chronic back pain is now recognized as a "chronic disease" by the World Health Organization because of its complex nature and the huge impact it has on our health, productivity and our economy.

Back pain is one of the most common and most challenging clinical conditions seen in medical practice. Back pain is so prevalent that it affects more than 75% of the population. In fact four out of five adults will experience back pain sometime during their lifetime and a high percentage of seniors will have a significantly reduced quality of life due to back pain conditions. Studies have demonstrated that back pain is a "co-morbidity" associated with another illness most commonly depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

Utilizing the new evidence and developing a **back resiliency plan** is key.

As is often the case in medicine, complex problems seem rarely to find their solution in one place or from one health care provider. On the contrary, a proper multi-disciplinary team is one with different skill sets, case management and common treatment goals. At SPINEgroup, our support team will assist you to develop a back resilience plan that is right for you to reduce the burden of pain and improve your quality of life.

In clinical practice, I often see seniors suffering with back pain who often have diabetes, depression, significant weight gain, anxiety and so on. These co-morbidities also reduce in severity once a multi-disciplinary team (e.g., spinal manipulation by a chiropractor, acupuncture, physiotherapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), massage and nurse-led case management) is utilized to manage your recurrent or chronic back pain.

It is evident from the seriousness of chronic back pain that an effective management model and support team are needed to reduce its impact. Since the musculoskeletal system is the body's foundational structure, back or spinal pain is typically an indication that "wear and tear" has occurred. Wear and tear means that muscle strength has declined, tendons/myofascial/joint tissue (once elastic) has now become rigid and ossified; inflammation from injured tissues is irritating adjacent structures, i.e. causing nerve pain, etc. In time, these structural changes will lead to significant functional alterations, impeding the quality of your life.

Identifying the Symptoms of Chronic Back Pain as Early as Possible

Nearly everyone has low back pain sometime but chronic back pain most commonly affects middle ages and senior populations. It occurs in part to the aging degeneration process but most often (as with other chronic diseases) as a result of **poor diet, weight gain, stress and sedentary life styles**. The risk of experiencing chronic back pain increases with **age**.

Symptoms of Chronic Back Pain

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Persistent low back pain
- Persistent neck pain
- Headaches
- Abnormal gait or mobility issues
- Persistent crying or complaints of pain when touched (infants and children)
- Abnormal posture, i.e. slumping, uneven shoulders (adolescents)
- Pain in one leg or both legs (seniors)
- Numbness or tingling in buttocks or legs or toes (seniors)
- Depression and/or Anxiety
- Avoidance of recreational activities
- Difficulty in Normal Activities of Daily Living

Key Messages for Back Resilience Plan

1. Not all patients have the same triggers to their low back pain. It is important that you understand the best activities and exercises for your recovery.

2. An MRI will show many structural alterations in the spine that are related to common anatomical changes from aging which may not be causing your back pain. This is why information from an MRI may not always help manage your recovery.

3. Most back pain is associated with impairment in strength and mobility; a side effect of having a sedentary lifestyle. In these cases it is best managed by temporarily

reducing pain in order to increase function, strength and flexibility.

What Causes Chronic Back Pain?

As people age and as we continue to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle, bone strength and muscle and connective tissue elasticity and tone tend to decrease. One common cause of chronic low back pain is spinal stenosis.

Spinal Stenosis:

Recent research suggests that spinal stenosis is caused as a result of micro instability at the joint surfaces surrounding the spinal canal. These changes are silent until they result in progressive loss of strength in joint capsule, leading to arthritic degeneration. The cartilaginous spinal discs begin to lose fluid and flexibility, which decreases their ability to cushion the vertebrae and thus begin to degenerate. Compression of neurological and micro-vasculature in the nerve roots lead to reduced blood supply to the lower extremities, most notable when walking.

Obesity, smoking, weight gain, stress, poor physical condition, posture inappropriate for the activity being performed, and poor sleeping position also may contribute to the pain of spinal stenosis. Additionally, scar tissue created when the injured back heals itself does not have the strength or flexibility of normal tissue. Buildup of scar tissue from repeated injuries eventually weakens the back and can lead to more injury and pain.

Spinal stenosis may cause more serious problems including loss of bowel or bladder control, severe pain when coughing and progressive weakness in the legs. People with diabetes may have pain radiating down the leg related to neuropathy which tends to complicate a stenosis condition. People with these symptoms should seek attention immediately to help prevent permanent damage.

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Dr. Connie D'Astolfo, DC, PhD (c) is a chiropractor and the director of SPINEgroup® an integrated medical rehab clinic located in Vaughan. Dr. D'Astolfo is currently pursuing a PhD at York University. She has several published peer reviewed articles and is a chapter author for several medical texts. Her interests include chronic disease prevention and management, spinal disorders and rehabilitation. You can visit our website at www.spinegroup.ca or contact our client care representative at 905-850-7746 for more information on our clinical programs including our popular Spine Care Program.

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