

Why Prolonging the Treatment of Back Pain is Detrimental to your Health

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

For those of you who follow my articles every month, you will be familiar with my persistent message that back chronic back pain is a very complex problem influenced by many factors including medical, psychological and social. In fact, back pain affects more than 75% of the adult population, with prevalence rates even higher in our seniors. Moreover, chronic back pain is extremely costly to the health care system, our work places and to us, as it is highly associated to other chronic health conditions such as depression, anxiety, hypertension and diabetes. Studies have also clearly demonstrated that back pain is a "co-morbidity" associated with another illness most commonly depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. In fact, recent research demonstrates that back pain is a significant risk factor for emergency room visits and hospitalizations in particular with our senior population.

Although patients should not attend physical therapy expecting an instant cure-all, studies have shown that early physical therapy for recent-onset low back pain resulted in improvements compared to receiving no care. Except for cases of initial spontaneous recovery, most patients benefit from seeking early physical therapy. Therefore, it makes sense to be as active as possible when new or recurring back pain occurs.

In other words, early physical therapy can increase your functionality and reduce pain, all without risk of further harm. For example, seeking early treatment or care for recurring back pain can definitely be useful for a patient who needs assistance in starting to exercise or remaining active (or remaining at work) while recovering from back pain.

Along with seeking early care, developing a back resiliency plan through a multi-disciplinary team is key to reducing the burden of pain and improving your quality of life.

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 resiliency 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, hip pain, 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 struc-

ture, 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.

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 lifestyles**. The risk of experiencing chronic back pain increases with age.

Symptoms of Chronic Back Pain Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Persistent back pain
- Burning pain in buttocks
- Pain in one leg or both legs
- Numbness or tingling in buttocks or legs or toes
- Weakness in the legs or "foot drop."
- More pain with standing and walking
- Less pain with leaning forward or sitting
- Depression and/or Anxiety
- 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.

Developing a back resiliency plan is key to controlling back pain.

Prevalence rates for neck and low back pain has been shown to increase steadily throughout adolescence and hits adult rates by ages 18 to 20. One third of teens report recurring back pain and one fifth have frequent and intense pain. Their pain impacts participation in sports and social activities



and negatively impact quality of life. Population studies have shown that children or teens who report spine pain also tend to suffer from spine pain throughout adulthood. It is evident that spinal pain in adolescents may not be simply dismissed as "growing pains" or transient pains. On the contrary, back pain in teens often requires a proper diagnosis and a treatment plan as early as possible to prevent future chronicity.

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At SPINEgroup, we strive for the highest possible standards in spine care. We are a unique clinic in Ontario that brings together a team of clinical experts trained in spine and spine related conditions targeted at diagnosing and managing chronic and complex spine pain disorders through coordinated programs of care. This means the treatment is aimed at getting you better, faster and at the lowest cost. Our chiropractor, physiotherapist, massage therapist and/or psychologist deliver the program of care and you are case managed by our registered nurse in conjunction with your family doctor and/or specialist.

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The program length is **16 sessions over 8 weeks**, followed by a consult at one month and at three months post discharge. Patients thereafter will receive assessments (in person or through teleconference) every year to ensure continued compliance, motivation and clinical outcomes. Your medical physician will receive reports on your progress.

SPINEgroup's SPINE CARE Programs offers a cost effective treatment option for those with chronic pain and disability, including severe degenerative disc disease, disc herniations and spinal stenosis.

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.