



Lifestyle & Prevention

Secondary prevention of low back pain

What is the effect of a self-management programme on the risk of recurrence and impact of low back pain?

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Low back pain is a highly prevalent condition worldwide. Most people with an episode of low back pain improve quickly, but around half of people who recover get a recurrence of their low back pain within a year.

A recent randomised controlled trial tested whether a programme based on exercise and education could prevent recurrences of low back pain in people who had recently (within the prior 6 months) recovered from low back pain.

The trial randomised 262 people to the exercise and education programme or to a control group, who received only a single phone call with basic advice. The primary outcome of this study was the risk of recurrence of activity-limiting low back pain.

The best estimate was that a McKenzie-based self-management exercise and education programme does not produce worthwhile reductions in the risk of an activity-limiting episode of low back pain; however, modestly reduced or moderately increased risk could not be ruled out.



Interestingly, the trial also assessed whether people had low back pain that required them to seek care from a health professional. Although the recurrence of back pain probably didn't decrease, there was a strong trend that care seeking tended to decrease in the experimental group.

This suggests that the exercise and education programme might help people to self-manage any recurrence of low back pain, rather than burdening the healthcare system. Despite this, the impact of the low back pain on the participants' lives was clearly unaffected by the exercise and education programme.

It is interesting to speculate whether a treatment could prevent care seeking even though it does not affect the impact of low back pain.

Although both interventions in this study offered strategies for self-management, the more intensive experimental intervention may have reinforced this message more effectively. Perhaps the experimental intervention does not delay the recurrence of low back pain and it still impacts people's lives, but it does effectively teach patients to self-manage well enough so that they do not need to seek care from a healthcare practitioner when low back pain recurs.

Want to read deeper into this topic? Have a look at the free full text version of this article published in [Journal of Physiotherapy](#)!

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