



Non-Specific Low Back Pain - Not Specific Enough Classification Improves PT Results

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Various guidelines for the clinical evaluation of low back pain (LBP) call for an initial classification process differentiating non-specific LBP from nerve root problems and more serious spinal pathology. The result is that 85% of patients with LBP are categorized with non-specific low back pain.¹ Authors have suggested that, while this broad category may be useful in medical practice, it can be deleterious to clinical research, clinical guidelines, and, resultantly, physical therapy practice.²⁻⁷ When research examining the effectiveness of therapy for LBP isolates a single treatment such as extension exercises, flexion exercises, manipulation, or traction, results are often equivocal.⁸⁻¹² Clinical recommendations then create very specific lists of therapy interventions that “may” be helpful for LBP, and sometimes recommend watchful waiting first. Unfortunately, physical therapy practices across the nation may also be treating the LBP diagnosis in a fairly undifferentiated fashion and limiting themselves to the activities approved in these clinical guidelines.

While the LBP diagnosis is useful for determining whether to refer to PT, it is in no way specific enough to denote the optimal physical therapy treatment plan (in practice or in research). A body of research by Anthony Delitto, Richard Erhard, and colleagues demonstrates that assessing and further categorizing LBP patients to determine the most appropriate PT treatments improves results.^{3,4,13,14} Most recently, they compared assessment-based treatment to treatment based on strict interpretation of the AHCPR guidelines for LBP.³ Their test subjects were 78 patients with work-related LBP severe enough to merit work modification. The guidelines group received reassurance, encouragement, education, advice to remain active, low-stress aerobic exercise, and general muscle reconditioning. Subjects in the assessment-based group received initial and ongoing assessment to determine which therapy interventions would be most appropriate (mobilization, manipulation, range of motion, flexion, extension, trunk strengthening, and/or traction). Assessment-based therapy was allowed to **begin during the acute phase of LBP.** A key difference between the two groups was that the assessment-based protocol allowed therapists to modify the treatments included in the protocol according to ongoing assessment. **At four week follow-up, the assessment-based group was 43% more likely to have no work restrictions compared to the guidelines group (83% vs. 58%). At one-year follow-up, the assessment-based therapy group was less likely to have additional missed work days (17% vs. 34%), had 13% lower therapy costs, and had 31% lower medical costs.** The assessment-based therapy treatment plan, delivered promptly after injury, produces results superior to strictly interpreted AHCPR “evidence-based guidelines.”



We cite this body of research because it highlights part of the Enfield Health & Wellness Center difference. We use “prescriptive exercise,” an assessment-based, individualized approach to all treatment plans, including plans for occupational low back pain. You can count on our experienced therapists to provide initial and ongoing assessments that will be used to hone the treatment plan to maximum possible effectiveness and efficiency. Our therapists know how to use the healing processes occurring during the acute and sub-acute phases of LBP to maximize long-term results.



McKenzie Certified Care

Literally hundreds of peer reviewed research papers now support the use of McKenzie Method. McKenzie Method is a therapy approach proven to produce faster, longer lasting, and less expensive results.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ This has been demonstrated repeatedly in journals such as *Spine*, the *Journal of Neurology*, *JMPT*, *Physiotherapy*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. McKenzie Certified care is one of the many therapy options available at Enfield Health & Wellness Center.

Please refer your patients to Enfield Health & Wellness Center

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