

# PHYSICAL THERAPY VIEWS

March 2010

## PAIN—YOU NEED TO MANAGE THEIR PAIN

You manage the care of patients with multiple types of issues from diabetes to high blood pressure to sinus infections to some type of pain complaint. At least once a day you have someone coming to your office with the complaint of pain. I'd be willing to bet the most frequent complaint of pain you have on your schedule is that of back pain.

I know from practicing in this community you do a great job following [Diagnosis and Treatment of Low Back Pain: A Joint Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society](#). Your role isn't easy because your patients come to you searching for an answer for the pain they are experiencing. Often times there isn't



Photo by [Rachhio](#) via Flickr

an answer. They are also looking for a quick fix. Again, there is no magic bullet for back pain.

From a physical therapist perspective, our research is strong in providing outcomes in a cost-effective way for those experiencing acute low back pain. Starbucks' employees in Seattle, undergoing services for low back pain at [Virginia Mason Medical Center](#), have reaped the benefits of receiving physical therapy first. The

average number of physical therapy treatment visits dropped from 10.34 to 4.68 while lost days of work was reduced from 12.02 to 3.98 days.

The original work published by Anthony Delitto et. al. identified a [treatment-based classification system](#) approach to low back pain. Although this approach continues to evolve, it is the crux of how evidence-based physical therapists address patients with low back pain.

Managing Back Pain .....	1
Should You be Concerned about Low Back Pain? .....	2
Want Details? .....	2

### Where can you Google to find more information?

[Diagnosis and Treatment of Low Back Pain: A Joint Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society](#)

[Virginia Mason Medical Center](#)

[Treatment-based Classification System Approach to Low Back Pain](#)

## SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED ABOUT LOW BACK PAIN?

Most definitely. Low back pain isn't always self-limiting. Approximately one third of the people you see for a first episode of low back pain will continue to have moderate back pain 1 year after the initial episode. Of those, 1 in 5 will continue to have significant problems in performing their daily activities.

Studies have shown early intervention by physical therapists who follow the treatment-based classification approach to low back pain can reduce the chance of developing chronic back pain from 15% to 2%. (Linton et. al. 1993 and Pinnington et. al. 2004)

The minority costs our society the most when it comes to chronic back pain.

Is there a way for you to know which patients with low back pain are at risk for unfavorable outcomes with primary care intervention? [Jellema et. al.](#) published their work which identifies which patients with low back pain would not fully respond to care provided in general practice. Their work may assist in determining which patients would be candidates for physical therapy services because waiting 4-6 weeks until the next follow-up visit may not lead to the anticipated response of the condition being self-limiting.

Here are a few key points that might suggest referral to a physical therapist.

1. Pain catastrophizing/worrying
2. Patient doesn't believe pain will resolve
3. Reports more than 3 episodes of back pain in previous year
4. Radiating pain and pain radiating below the knee
5. Tiredness
6. Perceived general health is low
7. Reports frequent walking during the day for job duties

It is becoming more and more relevant to consider more than just the patient's complaints and the presenting signs and symptoms. When it comes to pain, it is important to consider the patient's perceptions and expectations about their pain experience.



Photo by [johnnyalive](#) via Flickr

### WANT DETAILS?

If you received this newsletter via snail mail, you can venture to our website to find the PDF version. The PDF version includes hyperlinks to take you to the sources of information. It is most definitely less time consuming to click to learn more versus search in Google.

[www.redcedarphysicaltherapy.com](http://www.redcedarphysicaltherapy.com)

## DON'T BE AFRAID TO CONTACT US

We would like to be a valued team member in the care of your patients.

Please don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions regarding this issue.

Selena Horner, PT, MS, GCS, ATC

Liz Carls



1235 Grand River, Williamston, MI 48895

Phone: 517-655-8569

[www.redcedarphysicaltherapy.com](http://www.redcedarphysicaltherapy.com)

Remember  
Red Cedar  
Physical Therapy  
when choosing a  
physical therapist for  
your patients!