



RESEARCH TO
PRACTICE 2018

27-29 MARCH 2018
BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

DO BELIEFS OR EVIDENCE DICTATE THE WAY THAT WE MANAGE LOW BACK PAIN?

Prof Peter O'Sullivan

It is commonly believed that: low back pain (LBP) is caused by an injury and or damage to the spine, that backs need to be protected, postures controlled, the 'core' strengthened and activities that cause pain modified. Clinical practice often reinforces this belief with interventions to correct 'biomechanical faults' presumed to underlie LBP. These approaches together have not arrested the escalating cost and disability burden of LBP in our community.

Contemporary research suggests that LBP often develops in adolescence and sets a trajectory for later life, presenting more as a chronic disorder than an injury. Findings on MRI scan correlate poorly with a person's level of pain and disability and biomechanical faults are not strongly causally linked to LBP. There is growing evidence that disabling LBP is associated with unhelpful beliefs and pain related fear leading to avoidance and protective behaviors. This is manifest with increased trunk muscle co-contraction of the trunk muscles, slower and stiffer movement, questioning the more 'core' paradigm.

While exercise is known to benefit people with LBP, there is no evidence to suggest one exercise is better than another. There is growing evidence that interventions that: provide a personalized evidence based understanding of LBP, expose people to feared and avoided valued activities with pain control and address unhelpful lifestyle behaviors, may provide larger benefits. This approach demands a mindset change on the part of patients and health care providers.

Key Practice Points

- Disabling LBP is associated with negative beliefs, pain related fear and unhelpful protective and avoidance behaviors leading to sensitisation and disability
- Interventions that challenge these beliefs and behaviours have the potential to reduce the burden of pain and disability

Abstract number: 038
Session: Breaking the Pain Barrier Through Exercise
Date: Thursday, 29 March 2018
Time: 9:00am – 10:30am
Co-Presenters: Dr John Booth; Prof Peter O'Sullivan; Prof James McAuley
Panel Practitioner: Miss Deborah Fellowes
Session Chairperson: Mr Chris Tzarimas