

## Acute Low Back Pain Wait and See..... or Immediate Physiotherapy?

Is it too early to send my patient to  
Physiotherapy?

Will Physiotherapy make an acute low back injury  
worse?

The sports medicine approach has long been successful with immediate physical rehabilitation. The focus is early return of function allowing a return to sport as quickly as possible. Research has recently employing the same approach to returning individuals back to work when they have suffered an occupational musculoskeletal injury.

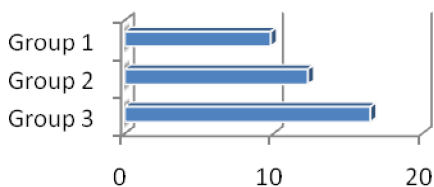
Traditionally medical practitioners treating occupational injuries have focused on pain relief and symptom control in the inflammatory phase. Physiotherapy is often initiated in the sub-acute phase of healing.

Internationally there are countries who's health authorities still propose a "wait and see" approach to acute low back pain. Health authorities in North America and the UK recommend various forms of early physical intervention.

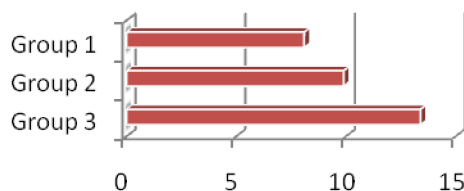
One study divided patients into 3 groups based on the time post injury at which Physiotherapy was initiated.

Group 1: Immediate (1-2 days post-injury)  
Group 2: Early (3-7 days post-injury)  
Group 3: Delayed (>7 days post-injury)

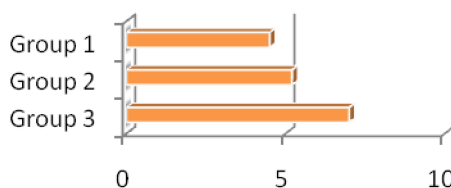
### Case Duration (Days)



### Restricted Work (Days)



### Work Missed (Days)



A second study compared assess/advise/treat against assess/advise/wait approaches to management of acute low back pain.

At 6 weeks the early treatment group demonstrated significantly greater improvements in disability, mood, general health and quality of life than those patients in the "wait" group. This is showing an early return to function.

The psychosocial impact of early treatment still continued to show benefit long term. This is a very important feature of early intervention as the psychosocial status of a client can prove a significant barrier to physical rehabilitation.

We recommend early Physiotherapy treatment in the management of acute low back pain

### References:

Zigenfus GC, Yin J, Giang GM, Fogarty WT. Effectiveness of early physical therapy in the treatment of acute low back musculoskeletal disorders. *J Occup Environ Med.* 2000 Jan;42(1):35-9  
Wand BM, Bird C, McAuley JH, Dore C, MacDowell M, DeSouza L. Early Intervention for the Management of Acute Low Back Pain: A Single-Blind Randomized Controlled Trial of Biopsychosocial Education, Manual Therapy and Exercise. *Spine.* 2004 Nov1;29(21):2350-6