

ADVANTAGE THERAPY INDUSTRY UPDATE

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A Courtesy Publication for the Springfield area HR/Safety Community

Low Back Pain: Can manual therapy return an injured worker to the job faster than exercise-based therapy alone?

An update on the effectiveness of manual therapy in treating acute low back pain

Humans are designed for hard work, but our backs are prone to injury.

Acute low back pain occurs in people working in a wide variety of industries, particularly those involving heavy labor, repetitive work activities, and extended sedentary postures.

It's no surprise that back injuries are costly to employers, accounting for 4 out of 5 work-related injuries. Three out of that four occur while an employee is lifting.

While administrative controls (pre-employment testing, training, stretching/conditioning programs, etc.) and engineering controls (reducing weight of objects lifted, adjusting heights of pallet/shelf, installing lifts/conveyors, etc.) can decrease and eliminate some injuries, no approach can totally eliminate acute injury.

Once an injury occurs, standard protocol for your company may include a visit to an occupational medicine clinic, prescribed medication, and possibly a referral to physical therapy.



Physical therapists treat patients with acute low back pain by utilizing a wide variety of interventions, including exercise and manual therapy. Most physical therapy practices solely use exercise or “traditional physical therapy” to treat nearly all injuries. Patients are assigned a sheet of standard exercises, and perform them in the clinic and at home.

Another common treatment for acute low back pain is the use of expert manual therapy. While under the broad umbrella of manual therapy, Muscle Energy Technique (MET) does not fall into the commonly known categories of mobilization and manipulation.

MET is an active technique where the patient, instead of the therapist/doctor supplies the corrective force. This technique is not painful to the patient, while it lengthens and strengthens muscles, to increase fluid mechanics and decrease swelling, and to mobilize a restricted area.

In a study comparing patients with low back injuries treated with exercise versus MET, the patients receiving MET showed greater decrease in reported pain after 8 therapy sessions (83% improvement for group receiving MET, compared to 65% improvement for patients performing exercise only).

MET is not confined to low back injury. Other injuries such as cervical, thoracic, and SI joint dysfunction respond well to this type of treatment. Often the best results are achieved when manual therapy techniques, like MET, are used in combination with exercises performed in the clinic, as well as a simple home exercise plan.

When reviewing treatment options for your next injured worker with acute low back pain, ask to review the protocol your therapy provider plans to use to rehabilitate your injured worker.

Make manual therapy an important part of your injured workers' treatment plan to reduce the number of therapy visits necessary to restore function and return to work.

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The first **5** people to call us with the misspelled word will win a **\$5 Starbucks gift card**.

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Applying the research in a real-world scenario

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Patient is a 31 year-old male, working as a loader at a farm supply center.

Physician's diagnosis: Low back pain with radiculopathy in the lumbosacral region

Patient's symptoms: Stiffness, soreness, and reported pain at 7/10 at first PT visit. Patient has difficulty sitting or standing for prolonged periods.

Prior testing: MRI with no findings

Case Study

This patient was loading 50 lb. blocks of material and while twisting to the right, his back began hurting.

Patient was referred to Advantage Therapy one month after the date of injury.

Manual therapy techniques, including Muscle Energy, were used to provide greater symmetry of his pelvis and lumbar spine. After 3 visits, MET was discontinued and the therapist used active range of motion, strengthening, and other manual techniques to improve the patient's pain and mobility.

After 11 visits, the patient reported no back pain, and 75-80% improvement in functional mobility since the initial evaluation.

He returned to full duty at the loading dock at the farm center.

While we know every situation and every patient is unique, if you would like similar results for your employees with work-related low back pain, send them to Advantage Therapy for physical therapy.

The hands-on techniques our therapists use achieve better results in a shorter period of time, reducing your company's expense.



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