

Recent Danish Study Supports: *See a Physical Therapist for Lower Back Pain*

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Does insufficient muscle strength or lack of muscular control contribute to low back pain (LBP)? According to a recently published article in the professional journal BMC-Medicine (Bio-Med Central Medicine), muscle strength and lower back pain are directly related, and the study supports the fact that when you experience lower back pain, you need to see a Physical Therapist.

“Masking pain with drugs will not strengthen your back,” according to Dr. Timothy W. Flynn, physical therapist and President of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT). “This Danish study suggests that when low back pain occurs, you should go see your physical therapist. We will work to rapidly alleviate the pain, and guide you in a program to prevent the pain from returning by improving the function of your low back muscles.”

The study published January 25, 2007, notes that because training of the lumbar muscles is a commonly recommended intervention LBP, it is important to clarify whether lumbar muscle atrophy is related to LBP. “Fat infiltration seems to be a late stage of muscular degeneration, and can be measured in a non-invasive manner using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).”

The purpose of this study was to investigate if fat infiltration in the lumbar multifidus muscles (LMM) is associated with LBP. A total of 412 adults (40-year-olds) and 442 adolescents (13-year-olds) from the general Danish population participated in this study.

People with LBP were identified through questionnaires. Using MRI, fat infiltration of

the LMM was visually graded as none, slight or severe. Results showed that fat infiltration was noted in 81% of the adults but only 14% of the adolescents. In the adults, severe fat infiltration was strongly associated with ever having had LBP.

The results of this study provide the first convincing evidence from a large population sample that fat infiltration in the lumbar multifidus muscles (LMM) is strongly associated with LBP in adults. “What that means,” said Flynn, “is that a physical therapist can not only help alleviate lower back pain with appropriate care, but we can help prevent the pain from coming back by developing a strength training program targeted at these muscles. In this way we collaborate with the patient in a comprehensive manner which deals with the problem instead of masking it with drugs, or being forced into costly and often unnecessary surgery.”

To view a copy of the article, go to: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1741-7015/5/2>. If you'd like more information on physical therapy and how it can help you with LBP, contact your local physical therapist or go to the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy web site at <http://www.aaompt.org>.