


Back Pain: Fact vs Fiction

 **Back Fiction:** “My back hurts, so it probably always will.”

Back Fact: Although low back pain is common, only a small number of people develop long-term pain that affects their usual activity. Most low back pain is due to simple sprains or strains that can be very painful but heal well.

If low back pain persists there is growing evidence that it's due to the body part remaining sensitive and overprotected. This is often due to protective behaviours or movement, lifestyle, emotional influences and negative emotions about the consequences of back pain. The pain system can become sensitised and overprotects us. Managing persistent back pain well relies on addressing the contributing factors specific to you.

You might feel concerned that there is an underlying medical problem causing your back pain. Fortunately, this is unusual and signs of this will be picked up during an assessment by a doctor or physio. If you're concerned, ask for their advice.

The key to reducing back pain is to stay fit and to move well and often.



Back Fiction: “The more my back hurts, the more damage I’m doing.”

Back Fact: Feeling more pain does not mean you’re doing more damage to your back.

Pain intensity is quite complex, but is more closely related to the sensitivity of the body systems associated with pain, rather than with levels of damage.

Research tells us that our pain levels can be affected by many things, including anxiety, an avoidance of activity because of pain, and fear, if we perceive pain as a threat.

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Back Fiction: “My back hurts because I have a weak core and bad posture.”

Back Fact: There is little evidence that links a lack of core stability with low back pain. If your nervous system is sensitive following an episode of low back pain, tensing your muscles or holding your body stiff can make the pain worse. If this is the case, core stability training isn’t going to help, as you will only be tensing your back even more!

Posture is often blamed for back pain too, but a lot of what we blame on ‘bad posture’ is actually staying in any one position for too long.

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Back Fiction: “I need a scan or X-ray for my back problem.”

Back Fact: People often ask me whether they need an X-ray or a scan for their back problem. Unless you’re showing signs of a more serious underlying issue, have specific nerve problems that are getting worse, or have back pain following trauma, the answer is no.

Things like degenerative discs, disc bulges and arthritic changes can show up on scans and these are normal findings that are a bit like seeing grey hair or wrinkles in the mirror.

Thinking these normal findings are the cause of pain can be damaging. It can create fear that alters behaviours and makes the problem worse.

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