

A positive outlook can speed whiplash healing

August 14 2009, By Quinn Phillips

(PhysOrg.com) -- Positive expectations can often lead patients to better recovery in a number of health conditions. Very little is known about expectations to recover from injury, such as whiplash. That was, until now.

Two University of Alberta researchers and their colleague from Sweden looked at recovery from whiplash in three separate studies, and their findings were surprising.

Linda Carroll, from the School of Public Health at the U of A, led the first study, which looked at a cohort of over 6,000 adults in Saskatchewan with traffic-related whiplash injuries.

"When people expected they would get better soon after a whiplash injury they actually recovered over three times as quickly as those that didn't think they'd get better," said Carroll.

Lena Holm did the same study, except in Sweden, and she found very similar results. Those who didn't think they'd get better quickly were four times less likely to recover.

Dejan Ozegovic, who works with Carroll in the School of Public Health, did the third study. He used the same cohort as Carroll, but in this study he asked them if they expected to return to work. The answers were "yes," "no" and "don't know." Those who answered "no" and "don't know" were lumped together as they had a similar course of recovery.

"We compared them to the people that said 'yes,' they will return to work. We discovered that those who said yes recovered 42 per cent faster," said Ozegovic.

The question remains, though, of whether the findings take into account the severity of the injury, because the researchers agree those who have more pain are going to have poorer expectations.

"That doesn't explain our findings because even when you consider initial pain, symptoms, their general health before the collision and post-injury [depression](#), after you put all those aside, control for them in the analysis, you still find that better expectations [begets] better recovery," said Carroll.

The group has already started on their next study, which will look at why some people have better expectations than others.

"Is it because of something you read, or what they've experienced in the past; for example, did they watch an uncle recover slowly or very quickly," said Carroll.

The group is hoping they can help people change their expectations by teaching them about their [injury](#).

"What we're hoping to uncover is whether this really important prognostic factor is something we can really influence in people," said Ozegovic. From that, he says, "we can provide education."

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-08-positive-outlook-whiplash.html>

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