

# Low back pain world's highest contributor to disability, study finds

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

(Medical Xpress)—Low back pain is the highest contributor to disability in the world, according to a pivotal international study released today.

A study published by *The Lancet* in the latest Global Burden of Disease Study, found lower back pain and osteoarthritis are now ranked second

only to cancer as a leading cause of disease burden in Australasia.

Professor Rachelle Buchbinder, from Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and [Preventive Medicine](#) and the Cabrini Institute led the study in collaboration with Professor Lyn March of the University of Sydney.

Professor Buchbinder said the findings confirmed the global burden of [low back pain](#) was much higher than previously estimated and re-allocation of resources for research, treatment and prevention was urgently needed.

"Our study shows that lower back pain and [osteoarthritis](#) are now ranked second only to cancer as the leading cause of disease burden in Australasia," Professor Buchbinder said.

"With ageing populations, it is highly likely this burden will increase, suggesting the health and research priorities that governments and others give to low back pain should be increased.

"Research is urgently needed to develop effective prevention and [treatment strategies](#) with the potential benefits of [public health interventions](#) likely to be substantial."

Extensive research from 47 countries found the global burden of disability due to low back pain was previously underestimated. The researchers identified 116 studies measuring the prevalence of [lower back pain](#) worldwide and found 780 estimates from 47 countries. They found the prevalence of low back pain was higher in women and peaked in adolescence and at age 65 years.

The study also found that in Australasia, musculoskeletal conditions account for 15 per cent of the total burden of death and disability, just

behind cancer at 16.2 per cent followed by heart disease, mental health and substance abuse at around 13 per cent.

"These are all important health issues and recognised as national health priorities by the Australian government but to date musculoskeletal conditions have not received an equitable level of priority," Professor Buchbinder said.

**More information:** [www.thelancet.com/themed/global-burden-of-disease](http://www.thelancet.com/themed/global-burden-of-disease)

Provided by Monash University

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