

Study aims to ease the burden of lower back pain

March 19 2014, by Kelly Stone



The University of South Australia is set to begin a new study into lower back pain, a condition which affects up to 80 per cent of Australian men and women at some stage in their lifetime.

The study will investigate whether [physical activity](#) – specifically [walking](#) at an intensity based on how individuals feel – will assist people suffering from chronic [lower back pain](#), where their lower back [pain symptoms](#) have persisted for longer than three months.

Dr Katia Ferrar, an Early Career Development Fellow with the School of Health Sciences, says the individual and community cost of chronic lower back pain is staggering.

"The [lifetime prevalence](#) of lower back pain in Australia is as high as 80 per cent – and 10 to 20 per cent of those sufferers go on to experience chronic lower back pain," she says.

"In addition to the pain, patients typically suffer various levels of physical disability and psychological distress. The pain is likely to disrupt their daily routine and reduce their capacity to participate in recreational activities. They may be unable to work and may be depressed."

Dr Ferrar, who worked as a physiotherapist before completing her PhD in the University's Health and Use of Time Group, says health professional guidelines recommend physical activity as a management tool for chronic lower back pain.

However, adults with chronic lower back pain present with unique barriers to physical activity which need to be overcome to facilitate long-term physical activity behaviour change, she says.

Dr Ferrar will examine if walking, self-regulated by how they are feeling, may provide an effective approach to increasing physical activity in people with chronic lower back pain.

"Research has demonstrated that if an exercise experience is pleasurable, people will be more likely to participate in it in the future," she says.

"A key distinction to this intervention is that it's based on how people feel. Basically if something feels better and people feel more in control, then they might do it more or make it a regular habit."

Dr Ferrar is seeking adults aged 35 to 55 years who have suffered lower back [pain](#) for longer than three months and who are not sufficiently physically active, to take part in her study.

Participants will join in an eight-week home-based walking trial. One group will receive some guidance regarding self-pacing their walking intensity and the other group will be encouraged to walk with no specific guidance on how to regulate their walking intensity.

Provided by University of South Australia

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