

# Patient education booklet reduces unnecessary imaging and sick leave of patients with lower back pain

September 23 2021

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The treatment of lower back pain is by no means always based on research evidence and, for example, too many imaging examinations are

still being carried out. Researcher Anna Sofia Simula assessed the effectiveness of the new patient education booklet in the treatment of lower back pain patients in her study conducted at the University of Oulu, Finland.

A total of over 400 patients with lower back pain took part in the study in eight health care units. For the study, the units were randomized into intervention and control groups.

The use of the patient [education booklet](#) significantly reduced both imaging examinations and sick leave days. During the one-year follow-up period, 18% of patients in the intervention group and 30% of patients in the control group underwent lower back imaging examinations. The average length of sick leave was around one week in the intervention group and as much as three weeks in the control group. There were no significant differences in physical function between the groups.

The results of the impact study were published in the scientific journal *BMC Family Practice*.

"The new patient education booklet is an affordable and effective way to reduce unnecessary imaging and sick leave days due to back pain. The results were in line with the suitability study of the booklet, which found that it facilitated the implementation of evidence-based treatment by professionals. Patients also felt that the booklet helped them to understand their back problems, and they felt encouraged to exercise. The implementation of the study in a normal health care environment makes it easier to put into practice. The extensive introduction of a patient education booklet in [primary health care](#) may help to reduce imaging examinations and sick leave days related to lower back [pain](#) in Finland and internationally," Simula says.

Originally developed by Australian researchers at Macquarie University,

the purpose of the patient education booklet is to promote evidence-based treatment of [lower back pain](#). The booklet contains correct information, reminds professionals of the recommended treatment, assists in clinical decision making and supports the interaction between the professional and the patient. The booklet has been translated into Finnish, and its applicability was examined in Simula's previous study in cooperation with professionals and patients.

**More information:** Anna S. Simula et al, Patient education booklet to support evidence-based low back pain care in primary care – a cluster randomized controlled trial, *BMC Family Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.1186/s12875-021-01529-2](#)

Provided by University of Oulu

Citation: Patient education booklet reduces unnecessary imaging and sick leave of patients with lower back pain (2021, September 23) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-patient-booklet-unnecessary-imaging-sick.html>

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