

Physiotherapy Treatment, the Earlier the Better?

Ever wonder why professional athletes, who have a salary of a few million dollars per year, receive **immediate physical therapy and rehab** after a back, knee or shoulder injury, while patients with work-related injuries are often made to wait several days or weeks before receiving physical therapy and rehab? Is a rapid return to function not as important for an average worker?

Contrary to most General Practitioners belief, that sending individuals with acute low back pain to physiotherapy will do more harm than good, there is evidence to show that this is not the case. For those who have the “let’s wait and see” mentality, the following studies suggest that this is the wrong way to go about things.

A retrospective study evaluated the effects of early physical therapy intervention on treatment outcomes for workers with acute low back injuries. Over 3800 patients with acute low back pain were assigned to one of three groups: Immediate PT (1-2 days post-injury); Early PT (3-7 days post-injury); Delayed PT (8-197 days post injury).



Result 1: Patients in Group I had the fewest number of physician visits overall. Group II had significantly fewer physician visits than Group III.

Result 2: Patients in Group I had the shortest length of therapy. Group II was significantly shorter in length than Group III.

Result 3: Patients in Group I had the least number of restricted workdays.

Result 4: Patients in Groups I and II had significantly fewer days away from work than those in Group III.

“The results of this study provide clear and strong indications that the sports medicine approach to rehabilitation, with the emphasis on early intervention and function restoration, could provide a cost-effective way to treat work-related back injuries.”

Reference:Zigenfus GC, Yin J, Giang GM, Fogarty WT. Effectiveness of early physical therapy in the treatment of acute low back musculoskeletal disorders.J.Occup Environ Med. 2000 Jan; 42(1):

Other References Supporting Early PT Intervention

“This study found that patients with work related musculoskeletal injuries **receiving early PT were significantly more likely to return to work** within 60 days than patients who were delayed in their referral to PT.”

Reference:Ehrmann-Feldman D, et al Physician referral physical therapy in a cohort of workers compensated for low back pain. Phys. Ther. 1996; 76: 151-157.

“Compared to those simply given advice to stay active, early Physiotherapy intervention led to significantly better outcomes in every area.”

Reference: Wand BM, et al Early intervention for the management of acute low back pain: a single-blind randomized controlled trial of biopsychosocial education, manual therapy, and exercise. Spine. 2004 Nov 1; 29(21): 2350-6.