

# Results Testimonial



“Thanks to the staff at Liberty. They helped me with the pain I was feeling. Today I feel a lot better and with less pain. Again, thank you for all the help.”  
-V.M.

... continued from Cover

For patients returning to the clinic after a long sedentary period at home, physical therapists should take their lifestyle changes into account by testing key strength and flexibility indicators and noting any muscle weakening or body mass increase. From there, manual therapy and other tried and true methods should be used. These patients, in particular, may benefit from the implementation of progressive endurance and fitness activities, including “moderate- to high-intensity exercise for patients with chronic low back pain without generalized pain” and “incorporating progressive, low-intensity, submaximal fitness, and endurance activities into the pain management and health promotion strategies for patients with chronic low back pain with generalized pain.”<sup>1</sup>

If you have a patient who is struggling with low back pain while dealing with lifestyle changes, these carefully considered and tested interventions could benefit patients looking for noninvasive alternatives to aid in their recovery, and we’d love to work with you to implement them. Reach out to our clinic today to discuss opportunities for working together in order to overcome these new hurdles.



**North Central**  
415 Embassy Oaks Dr.  
STE 202  
San Antonio, TX 78216

**Northeast**  
2130 NE Loop 410  
STE 212  
San Antonio, TX 78217

**Southside**  
2600 SW Military Dr.  
STE 206  
San Antonio, TX 78224



# Physician Update

June 2020

## The Link Between a Sedentary Lifestyle and Low Back Pain A Potential Pitfall of Social Distancing

Over the last few months, the coronavirus pandemic has turned life upside down for physical therapists, physicians, and patients. As a result of full and partial shelter-in-place orders, many physical therapists temporarily closed their offices or began limiting the number of patients allowed on the premises to one or two at a time. Meanwhile, patients became housebound, many turning to more sedentary lifestyles in reaction to gym closures and bans on group fitness classes. This shift could have implications for the management and recovery of complex conditions like low back pain, which benefit from exercise interventions.<sup>4</sup>

Low back pain is the No.1 cause of disability worldwide,<sup>4</sup> affecting 31 million Americans according to the American Chiropractic Association. Manual physical therapy is a highly effective treatment, as are interventions like trunk coordination, strengthening, and endurance exercises. Some evidence suggest lumbar flexion exercises could be beneficial as well.<sup>1</sup>

Innovative ways to treat and maintain contact with patients, including telehealth measures like video conferencing, have kept patients and their physical therapists connected during the pandemic. This has allowed PTs to successfully recommend and demonstrate exercises to mitigate low back pain, assisting patients in continuing their pain management and recovery. However, remote contact interferes with the ability to provide effective manual therapy, and other changes in patient lifestyles — like decreased physical activity as a result of social distancing, interrupted sleep, emotional upheaval, and other factors<sup>4</sup> — could have a negative impact on recovery and pain mitigation.

It’s unclear whether a sedentary lifestyle can increase the severity of low back pain, but it has been linked to conditions that increase its prevalence. This isn’t due to posture issues (e.g. spending time relaxed on the couch versus sitting straight-backed in an office chair). In fact, studies show that “helping people to adopt more relaxed postures, while reassuring them that these postures are safe, can provide symptom



relief.”<sup>6</sup> Rather, it’s due to a lack of physical activity. Neglect of physical movement can lead to conditions like muscle atrophy and increased fat content, which correlate negatively with low back pain.<sup>2,7</sup>

So, what approach can a physical therapist take when faced with these realities and the challenges of either continuing to work with patients remotely or working directly with patients whose lifestyles have changed dramatically for the worse in the last few months? Past studies, though not undertaken with pandemic conditions in mind, can provide some insight.

For patients still social distancing or exercising at home for other reasons, a physical therapist can take several courses of action in addition to the highly effective telehealth measures detailed previously. One is to encourage patients to follow home-exercise programs and gather insights into their confidence using the Self-Efficacy for Home Exercise Programs Scale (SEHEPS) and Self-Efficacy for Exercise (SEE) scales. One study of 81 patients with musculoskeletal conditions found SEHEPS was a consistent, reliable measure of self-efficacy for performing prescribed home exercise programs.<sup>5</sup> Patients with chronic low back pain also may be more likely to complete at-home exercises if they are convenient and/or strength- and flexibility-based, one cross-sectional study shows.<sup>3</sup>

Continued on Back ...

1. Delitto, A., George, S. Z., Van Dillen, L., Whitman, J. M., Sowa, G., Shekelle, P., ... Godges, J. J. (2012). *Low Back Pain. Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, 42(4), A1–A57. doi:10.2519/jospt.2012.42.4.a1  
2. Demoulin, C., Crielaard, J.-M., & Vanderthommen, M. (2007). *Spinal muscle evaluation in healthy individuals and low-back-pain patients: a literature review. Joint Bone Spine*, 74(1), 9–13. doi:10.1016/j.jbspin.2006.02.013  
3. Francois, S. J., Lanier, V. M., Marich, A. V., Wallendorf, M., & Van Dillen, L. R. (2018). *A Cross-Sectional Study Assessing Treatment Preference of People With Chronic Low Back Pain. Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*. doi:10.1016/j.apmr.2018.04.027  
4. O’Sullivan, P., Canero, J. P., O’Keefe, M., & O’Sullivan, K. (2016). *Unraveling the Complexity of Low Back Pain. Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, 46(11), 932–937. doi:10.2519/jospt.2016.0609

5. Picha, K. J., Lester, M., Heebner, N. R., Abt, J. P., Usher, E. L., Capilouto, G., & Uhl, T. L. (2019). *The Self-Efficacy for Home Exercise Programs Scale: Development and Psychometric Properties. Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, 1–35. doi:10.2519/jospt.2019.8779  
6. Slater, D., Korakakis, V., O’Sullivan, P., Nolan, D., & O’Sullivan, K. (2019). *“Sit Up Straight”: Time to Re-evaluate. Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, 49(8), 562–564. doi:10.2519/jospt.2019.0610  
7. Teichtahl, A. J., Urquhart, D. M., Wang, Y., Wluka, A. E., O’Sullivan, R., Jones, G., & Cicuttini, F. M. (2015). *Physical inactivity is associated with narrower lumbar intervertebral discs, high fat content of paraspinal muscles and low back pain and disability. Arthritis Research & Therapy*, 17(1). doi:10.1186/s13075-015-0629-y