

Chronic low-back pain may be perpetuated by the brain

Question: I have chronic low-back pain and no matter what treatment I have tried including medical and natural, I can't break the pain cycle. Why does this happen and is there any hope?

Answer: Research has shown that 70- to 80-percent of chronic back pain duration and intensity is controlled by patterns in the brain. Traditional medical care has struggled to offer much relief for chronic back pain. Attempts to fix problems locally in the low back have had very little success for any long-term relief. Blocking the pain with drugs or surgery has not been successful nor attends to the cause of the problem. A recent study explained why this might be happening. Magnetic resonance imaging studies of the brain correlate specific brain activity with fluctuations in the intensity of chronic low-back pain and found that chronic low-back pain correlates with a variety of brain abnormalities. The results indicate the brain may account for as much as 70- to 80-percent of the intensity and duration of pain in chronic back pain cases. This means that chronic low-back pain plunges the emotional and “mentalizing” region of the brain into a self-perpetuating state of continuous negative emotions and suffering. Once you have been experiencing low-back pain for some time the brain apparently perpetuates it.

The only solution is prevention. Getting the pain signals shut down from the back early on might help prevent this response of perpetuation in the brain. I have found that the sooner a patient gets into our office for chiropractic treatment during the acute phase of their condition the greater the results in preventing

chronic pain in the future. Six weeks or more is often considered the threshold for chronic pain in studies but this is a rather arbitrary number. There is no real line between acute and chronic low-back pain. It is more of a gradual change and every individual respond uniquely to his or her condition based on repetitively of the irritation, age, general health etc.

The sooner you get care for your low-back pain the less likely the brain will fall into the self perpetuating state. And unlike drugs for pain that only covers up the pain, chiropractic care seeks to correct the cause of the problem that is sending those constant pain signals to the brain.

Quote of the week: *“He who does anything because it is custom, makes no choice.”* – John Stuart Mill