



Looking for the cause of back pain

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18 July 2007, A University of Auckland study is looking for people who suffer from chronic back pain to increase understanding about the muscles involved.

It is estimated that 70% to 85% of all people will suffer from back pain at some time their life. Pain may be acute and brought on from a particular incident, or, in some instances, may arise in the absence of any clear event. Often the pain will subside after a short time but occasionally the pain may continue well after the rest of the body has recovered, resulting in a chronic pain condition. In New Zealand alone, treatment and disability costs resulting from back pain are in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

"We still have a lot to learn about low back pain, which often leaves the cause of the pain unidentified and the patient frustrated and exhausted," says lead researcher Jamie Mannion of the Exercise Rehabilitation Clinic. "Researching differences between low back pain sufferers and pain-free individuals is one of the best ways of gaining a better understanding of how to treat this painful condition. This knowledge will ultimately assist in better diagnoses and better treatments for sufferers of low back pain."

Mr Mannion is particularly interested in talking to people who suffer from non-specific low back pain so that he can identify differences between them and pain-free individuals. "The thigh muscles are particularly important when considering back pain as they greatly influence the pelvis and the lower spine. However, while we know these muscles are altered with low back pain, we don't really understand or know the extent or effects of these alterations. My research will be looking at the functioning of these muscles in relation to back pain."

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