

Naturopathic care for chronic low back pain: a randomized trial.

Citation: Szczurko O, Cooley K, Busse JW, Seely D, Bernhardt B, Guyatt GH, Zhou Q, Mills EJ. PLoS ONE, 2007;2(9):e919.

OBJECTIVE: Chronic low back pain represents a substantial cost to employers through benefits coverage and days missed due to incapacity. We sought to explore the effectiveness of Naturopathic care on chronic low back pain.

METHODS: This study was a randomized clinical trial. We randomized 75 postal employees with low back pain of longer than six weeks duration to receive naturopathic care (n = 39) or standardized physiotherapy (n = 36) over a period of 12 weeks. The study was conducted in clinics on-site in postal outlets. Participants in the naturopathic care group received dietary counseling, deep breathing relaxation techniques and acupuncture. The control intervention received education and instruction on physiotherapy exercises using an approved education booklet. We measured low back pain using the Oswestry disability questionnaire as the primary outcome measure, and quality of life using the SF-36 in addition to low back range of motion, weight loss, and Body Mass Index as secondary outcomes.

RESULTS: Sixty-nine participants (92%) completed eight weeks or greater of the trial. Participants in the naturopathic care group reported significantly lower back pain (-6.89, 95% CI, -9.23 to -3.54, $p < 0.0001$) as measured by the Oswestry questionnaire. Quality of life was also significantly improved in the group receiving Naturopathic care in all domains except for vitality. Differences for the aggregate physical component of the SF-36 was 8.47 (95% CI, 5.05 to 11.87, $p < 0.0001$) and for the aggregate mental component was 7.0 (95% CI, 2.25 to 11.75, $p = 0.0045$). All secondary outcomes were also significantly improved in the group receiving naturopathic care: spinal flexion ($p < 0.0001$), weight-loss ($p = 0.0052$) and Body Mass Index (-0.52, 95% CI, -0.96 to -0.08, $p = 0.01$).

CONCLUSIONS: Naturopathic care provided significantly greater improvement than physiotherapy advice for patients with chronic low back pain. TRIAL

REGISTRATION: Controlled-Trials.com ISRCTN41920953.

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