

Every Doctor has an Opinion - But Which One is Right?



By:
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ter. How are you supposed to make sense out of all the different information?"

It can be confusing to get what seems to be opposing information from different practitioners. Health care professionals working with patients who have back pain, often specialize. This focus means they come from differing points of view, giving conflicting opinions to the patient. What's more frustrating is that they can all be right.

If you bend over to pick up a box, or are in an auto accident and hurt your back, it can be appropriate to rest for up to 3 days to allow the swelling to subside and the muscles to rest. Studies do show that 3 days of rest is maximum, and that any more "rest" can actually do more harm than good. Rest usually does feel good but you

lose flexibility, strength, and endurance with too much "rest".

This is when a good exercise program is helpful. Now when a lot of us hear "exercise program" we think that means running around the track or swimming 20 laps. NOOO! A good exercise program for low back pain (LBP) may start with a couple of minutes on a heating pad and then performing gentle stretching exercises for the muscles that are injured.

As you feel better, adding walking, swimming, or bike riding begins to build your strength and endurance, allowing you to resume your normal level of activities. So many times, we miss this part because when the pain is gone we go back to our busy lives and don't complete the rehab process.

Sometimes surgery is indicated, although, fortunately, not that often. Bulging and even herniated discs are not an automatic reason for surgery. As we get beyond 30, it is not unusual to have "degenerative changes" of our spine. These degenerative changes include herniated discs. Several years ago, a study involving 100 people with no LBP had an MRI of their low back. Fifty percent showed degenerative changes, including bulging and herniated discs but no back pain. Therefore, your

pain may not be coming from a bulging or herniated disc.

Still confused? Keep asking questions until you understand. Everyone is different and while there are similarities with LBP, you want treatment tailored to you and your specific pain. Get a second opinion if you are not sure; and take a conservative approach for a couple of weeks. Ask for physical therapy to see if it helps. Call me if you still have questions about this complex situation.

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Deb Lavender is a physical therapist with over 25 years of experience providing hands-on manual therapy. She owns Des Peres Physical Therapy in Des Peres and accepts all insurances.

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