

Lower Back Pain Is there a cure?

At Restored Balance, the number one complaint expressed by our clients is lower back discomfort and pain. Even clients who are visiting us for other reasons often indicate lower back pain as an issue they deal with on a daily basis as they complete their initial paperwork. Some of them suffer from mild achiness while others are in excruciating pain 24/7/365. And, of course, everywhere in between both ends of the spectrum. If you are a lower back pain sufferer then we potentially have some good news for you. Of the clients that come to us to have their lower backs worked on, approximately 50% receive total relief. Another 30% (approximately) receive some relief in varying degrees although their pain is never completely eliminated. Only about 20% (or more simply put, 1 out of every 5) feel little or no relief at all from their massage or medical massage treatments.

Obviously, we have no scientific method to determine who the unlikely 5th person is going be whom we will not be able to help, but, for the rest, help is on the way. In reality, there is really no way for you to know either whether the treatments will help you or not. We have had individuals in horrendous pain come in and their pain has been totally eliminated. We have had others with minor discomfort for whom we have not been able to offer any relief. It really depends upon the cause or source of the pain or discomfort. In the following paragraphs, I discuss some of the most common sources for lower back pain and why medical or therapeutic massage might be the solution for which you are searching.

The most common issue is one that virtually everyone has dealt with at one point or another in their life. It is a simple back ache due to the over-exertion of the lower back muscles. This is more or less the nuisance type of back pain. You've been out all day working in the garden or mowing the lawn or playing with the grandkids. You finally get a chance to sit down and, lo and behold, your lower back hurts. In most cases, you have simply over-worked muscles that normally are not placed under that kind of strain. These muscles will tend to stay loose but will feel very tender from the additional stretching. A little rest, a few Tylenol, and maybe a heating pad and you will be set to go.

The next condition is similar to the one above only the workout has been slightly more vigorous. This time, instead of the over-worked muscles getting sore but staying loose, they begin to tighten up. They do this to protect themselves AND to protect your skeletal structure. After being yanked and pulled and twisted, the muscles begin to wise up. They react with the response -enough is enough! They begin contracting so they are not as vulnerable to being over-stretched to capacity, being pulled in unfamiliar directions, or being strained from lifting heavy loads. By tightening down, your muscles are simply trying to avoid further injury. There is another reason why muscles tighten down. When the exercise or activity being performed places an unusual strain on the actual skeletal structure, the muscles will tighten down to reinforce the movable joints, the weakest part of the structure. The body knows that too much strain on any single joint can cause significant damage and, therefore, attempts to avoid it by constricting the muscles around the joint. Remember, every place where a bone connects with another bone or with a vertebral disc is a joint that the body is attempting to protect. Lower back pain caused by this type of muscle constriction is still helped by rest, Tylenol, and a heating pad, although more significant measures may also need to be taken; a good soak in a hot tub, the application of an analgesic like Biofreeze or Ben Gay, or possibly a nice relaxing therapeutic massage may be in

order. The quicker muscular balance can be restored, the better your chance of avoiding further complications.

Except for significant trauma, this is usually the start of what later becomes a major back problem. If the muscles of the lower back remain constricted, the excess tension forces the lubricating moisture out from between the different muscle bodies. The dehydrated area consequently begins to stick together rather than the muscles gliding smoothly beside one another. If you can imagine a muscle that runs side to side laying over top of another muscle that runs up and down, perpendicular to one another. Now, imagine the location where the two muscles cross is glued together. When one muscle expands or contracts (either one), it directly affects the other muscle by pulling in on both ends. Therefore, all the muscles end up working and pulling against one another, causing perpetual (chronic) pain. It may take several sessions of either therapeutic deep tissue massage or medical massage but, once the muscles are released and the moisture returned between the muscles, everything should be just fine with no residual pain.

If, however, the muscles described above have tightened down to the point where they are compressing the vertebrae together, this opens up a whole other issue. In addition to the muscular pain, the compression of the vertebrae and discs may start to impair the functioning of the nerves that branch out from the spine. The greater the compression, the more the nerves are impacted and may even lead to nerves being completely blocked. Again, medical massage can get in and release the muscles, thus relieving the pressure from the compression. This may or may not relieve all the pain, depending on the extent of damage done to the nerves. The massage may also relieve the pressure presently but it may take several weeks until total relief is felt when the nerves have had time to heal.

Unless there is a structural or genetic defect, the compression caused by the tight muscles is often the cause of degenerating, bulging, herniated, and eventually ruptured discs. We cannot guarantee it but quite a few of our clients have seen their less severe disc problems reversed or eliminated.

If you are one of the unfortunate individuals that has actually endured back surgery and still has or has developed pain since the surgery, the accumulation of scar tissue around the surgical site might be part of the problem. Also, the trauma from the surgery may have triggered the muscles to tighten down again. Medical massage can help break down the scar tissue and release those traumatized muscles. (We can begin massage work approximately two weeks post surgery.)

All the scenarios described above assume that strained muscles are the original source of the lower back condition. Other issues may also cause lower back problems. The most common issue is a structural misalignment or torque within the bones of the pelvis. Not only can these misalignments strain the joint where the pelvic bones attach to the spine (SI Joint), but it can also cause leg length discrepancies, a rotation of the upper torso, an anterior or posterior tilt of the pelvis, or a roto-scoliosis of the spine.

Another often overlooked source of lower back pain is pulling that occurs on the lower back from internal tension. There are several muscle groups that attach to the inside of the back and across the top of the pelvis and pull downward toward the groin area. If these muscles become tight, they can cause unexplained pain right at the base of the spine and moving out to either side.

Regardless what the source of your lower back pain, there is a good chance that either our therapeutic massage or our medical massage services will be of benefit to you.