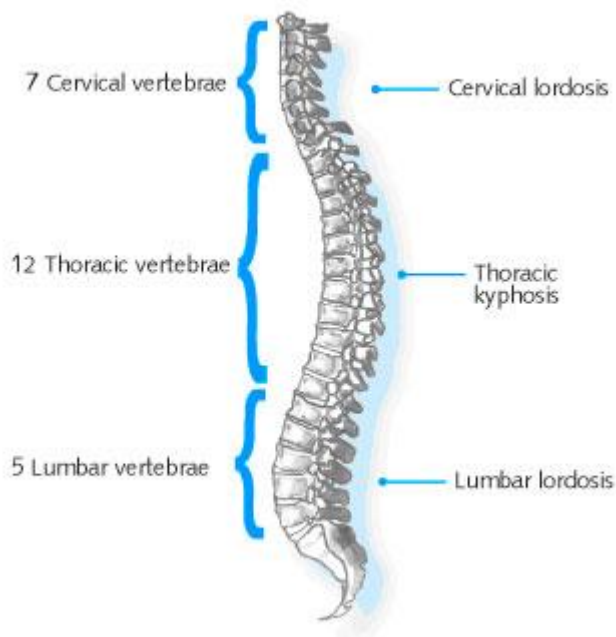
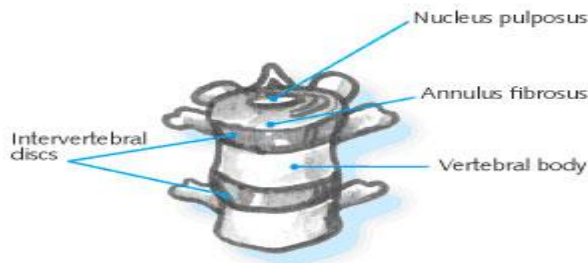


Low Back pain.

Low back or lumbar spine pain is one of the most common complaints that people have. Statistics show that 90% of people will experience low back pain at some stage in their lives. And whilst most of these episodes will recover, there are still a large number of people who develop chronic low back pain.

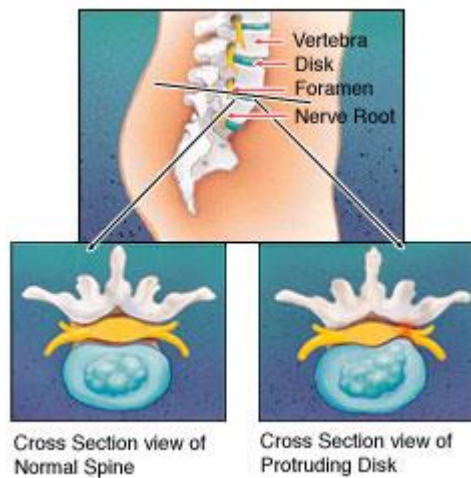


Our lumbar spine consists of the bottom 5 vertebrae, these are large bones as they are taking the weight of the whole upper body. Each vertebrae has a joint on either side known as a facet joint where our movement originates. Between each bone is a disc. This is made up of fibrous outer layers with a soft nucleus in the centre. Our discs are responsible for acting as shock absorbers and assisting with movement. The disc is weaker at the back, which is where most of the damage occurs. At each spinal level we have a nerve which supplies a certain part of our leg. These 5 nerves combine to form the sciatic nerve which passes down the back on our bottoms, and down the back of the leg to the foot. Sciatica is a term referring to inflammation or aggravation to the sciatic nerve. What is more important is what is causing this; the disc, facet joints or muscle spasms?



With our changing lifestyles and the introduction of technology and computers people are tending to be sitting for longer periods during the day. If they sit with poor slouched posture, it has an impact on our backs, neck and especially the disc. Add this to the fact that people who lead a sedentary lifestyle during the week, then go out and expect to be able to do the hard gardening, concreting and lifting, it's no wonder the back is placed under stress.

Our discs are often damaged by repeated bending, lifting and digging. The disc is weaker at the back, therefore develops a bulge at the back, this in turn presses on nerves and tissues around it causing pain++ and dysfunction. If the disc is pressing on a nerve then the pain will radiate down the leg, and may cause pins and needles, numbness or muscle weakness. A disc injury does not like any sitting, driving or bending, but prefers standing, walking and lying flat as this allows the disc bulge to be reduced. A prolapsed disc is often incorrectly referred to as a 'slipped disc'. This is when the disc completely ruptures and basically explodes. The disc cannot 'slip' out of place, it can bulge and be reduced, or rupture.



Facet joints are often damaged by compression or a fall, lifting, leaning backwards or twisting. These can also cause a lot of pain, but rarely cause sciatica or pain down the leg. Facet joints like to be moved, but don't like to be stuck in one place, or compressed. Often people's main complaint is pain with sitting and standing.

Studies have shown that when low back pain occurs the body will 'switch off' our muscles in order to prevent us from moving the injured area and will spasm muscles to protect the area. The main muscles it 'switches off' are our core stability muscles and deep abdominals. This is the worse thing that the body can do, as these muscles do not necessarily 'switch back on' after the injury has cleared. There is a large body of evidence to support this and explain why low back pain can often become chronic or long term. If these muscles are not retrained, in the way that any muscle is retrained, with specific exercises, then further injury is likely to occur as the spine is not supported or stabilised.

Manipulation, massage, heat and stretches are all helpful in alleviating the pain, but these do not retrain and strengthen the core muscles, which can lead to re-injury and chronic pain. Pilates and gym ball exercises are a few of the exercises which can 'switch on' these muscles when they are performed correctly. These have a place in treating acute and chronic low back pain.

ACC guidelines for Low Back pain include;

- Stay as active as able
- Specific back exercises will help to relax the muscles in the back and realise that the movement of the spine will aid the healing process
- Restore spinal mobility
- Restore muscle strength

Mangawhai Physiotherapy

4a Wood Street, Mangawhai Heads

09 431 4476

- Keep fit and avoid stress
- Most back pain will resolve in a month

There is no place for bed rest in the treatment of LBP. Studies have shown that after 2 weeks bed rest following a low back injury there was a 6% decrease in vertebral bone density, which you cannot regain.

Physiotherapists are fully qualified in the treatment and prevention of low back pain. Any pain is easier to treat with quick effective treatment, so don't wait too long after an injury before contacting us, the sooner you start the treatment, the faster you will recover. When pain has been around for a long time, you develop associated muscle spasms, weakness and tightness as your body tries to compensate for the pain. If pain is continuous for 3 or more months our brains start to re-wire themselves and start to believe that any movement is dangerous and painful, and therefore tell us not to move, which can have serious impact on a person's function and rehabilitation, so if you have pain or an injury act now!