

NEWS RELEASE

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Most Americans Live With Low Back Pain – and Don't Seek Treatment

The American Physical Therapy Association Reveals Survey Results, Relief Strategies for Low Back Pain

ALEXANDRIA, VA, April 4, 2012 – Nearly two-thirds of Americans experience low back pain, but 37 percent do not seek professional help for pain relief, according to the American Physical Therapy Association's (APTA) ["Move Forward" Low Back Pain Survey](#). The survey provided results from more than 2,600 people aged 18 and older, who disclosed their experiences and habits regarding low back pain.

"Most people experience low back pain at some point in their lives, but many people don't realize they can prevent or treat the condition with the help of a physical therapist," said [APTA spokesperson Mary Ann Wilmarth, PT, DPT, OCS](#), chief of physical therapy at Harvard University. "For Americans living with low back pain, everyday tasks can be a challenge, and this survey revealed just how much this condition can affect someone's quality of life."

Highlights from the "Move Forward" Low Back Pain Survey include:

- More than one-third of adults say low back pain has affected their ability to engage in tasks of daily living (39 percent), exercise (38 percent), and sleep (37 percent).
- Low back pain isn't just for those who spend a lot of time on their feet. In fact, over half (54 percent) of Americans who experience low back pain spend the majority of their workday sitting.
- Men (31 percent) are more likely than women (20 percent) to report that low back pain affects their ability to do work.
- When experiencing low back pain, nearly three in four (72 percent) Americans use pain medication as a way to relieve their symptoms. More than half (55 percent) said they use heat and cold packs at home for relief.

While low back pain is a common problem, it doesn't have to be a common part of everyday life. Physical therapists advise staying as active as possible and sticking to a normal routine, since bed rest for longer than a day can actually slow down recovery. Most low back pain is not serious; much of the time it is caused by overuse, strain, or injury. Rarely, low back pain is caused by a more serious condition such as a herniated disc or osteoarthritis. If pain lasts more than a few days or gets worse, it may be advisable to make an appointment with a physical therapist.

By determining the cause of a patient's low back pain, physical therapists get to the source of the problem and [develop a treatment plan](#), which may include a combination of exercises to strengthen the back, manual therapy to improve the mobility of joints and soft tissues, and education about how to take better care of the back to relieve pain in the long term.

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“Results from the survey confirmed what we suspected – that low back pain has an impact on everyday life, and Americans often focus on the symptoms, rather than the cause of their back pain,” said Wilmarth. “What they might not know is that movement often provides the best long-term relief for pain. As movement experts, physical therapists can help restore mobility, reduce pain, and improve quality of life.”

Americans in 46 states and the District of Columbia can access the services of a physical therapist for an evaluation without a physician’s referral—and in many cases receive treatment.

BlogTalkRadio Show

The Move Forward campaign will host a BlogTalkRadio show on Monday, April 23 from 7-8 pm ET, to discuss the results of the survey. Guests will include APTA spokesperson Mary Ann Wilmarth, PT, DPT, OCS, who will discuss strategies for relieving low back pain. [Mike Ryan, PT, ATC, PES](#), physical therapist and athletic trainer for the Jacksonville Jaguars, and CoLette Morgan, MD, with Emory University and [AARP Georgia](#) volunteer, will join the show to discuss low back pain as it relates to athletes and aging, respectively. The show will also cover prevention strategies and proper techniques for everyday activities. For more information on how you can prevent and manage back pain with the help of a physical therapist, visit www.moveforwardpt.com.

About the Move Forward Back Pain Survey

The Move Forward Low Back Pain Survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive via its QuickQuery omnibus product on behalf of APTA December 15-19, 2011, among 2,646 adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Erin Wendel at erinwendel@apta.org.

About APTA

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) represents more than 80,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants and students of physical therapy nationwide. Learn more about conditions physical therapists can treat and find a physical therapist in your area at www.moveforwardpt.com/findapt. Consumers are encouraged to follow us on [Twitter](#) (@MoveForwardPT), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [Pinterest](#).

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