

Treating back pain with movement

*According to statistics, nine out of ten people will experience back pain at least once in their lives. Although this pain often gets better after a few weeks, some people can suffer from recurring pain that causes debilitating symptoms, to the point of it affecting their daily lives and limiting their movement due to the fear of pain. However, movement plays an important role in the recovery process. newSpecial asked **Maud Ismail**, Head of the Occupational Therapy Department, explains more.*



Maud Ismail, Occupational Therapist

NEWSPECIAL ASKED MAUD ISMAIL SOME QUESTIONS

In Switzerland, back pain affects more than half of the adult population. How can occupational therapy help these people?

Generally speaking, occupational therapy helps patients to maintain or improve their independence in daily activities. It is an important therapy in the recovery process, particularly in terms of orthopaedic and neurological rehabilitation. It can also be adapted to manage chronic back pain that has become severely disabling and is causing difficulties in everyday life.

In most cases, chronic back pain prevents patients from doing most or all of their daily tasks and hobbies. Therefore, our aim is to help patients to get on with their lives, improve their quality of life, build confidence in their abilities and overcome any potential kinesiophobia, the fear of pain due to movement.

How do you treat back pain?

We work closely with patients to firstly assess the situations that they find challenging in their daily lives and then determine physical approaches that

will allow them to reduce their discomfort and maintain their lifestyle while avoiding the onset of pain. Together, we perform a range of real-life tasks to find the best positions.

We also offer assistive devices, such as back support pillows for sleeping, reaching aids for picking up objects from the floor and even bath boards to help achieve a comfortable position in the bath. All these methods share the common goal of making patients more active and more independent.

Occupational therapy often talks about the vicious circle of pain. What does this mean?

Literature identifies two different approaches for dealing with pain: you can avoid it or confront it. In the case of avoidance, the fear of pain can lead to safety-seeking behaviours and being extremely overcautious, to the point of avoiding any movement that could be painful. Over time, this leads to a decline in physical function as well as a significant decline in quality of life, because patients stop doing everything they enjoy. This is why occupational therapy helps patients to confront pain so that they can move better and move more.

Are other therapies recommended in addition to occupational therapy?

Yes, physiotherapy is particularly recommended as it aims to improve strength, balance, stability and overall mobility, thereby helping to reduce the intensity and frequency of pain. In some cases, psychotherapy sessions may be recommended to help patients better understand and manage their pain.

You have developed an outpatient programme at Clinique Valmont that specialises in managing back pain. Who is it for?

This interdisciplinary programme is for anyone, of any age, who suffers from chronic pain that is significantly affecting their daily life. All types of insurance coverage are accepted. Patients simply need to be referred by their doctor and contact us to make an appointment. ■

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