

SquareONE Rehabilitation

Educational Tips

Learn How to Prevent Chronic Pain in the Retail Industry

Billy (name changed) is a 26-year old pharmacist. Despite her young age, she began to experience chronic lower back pain 2 years ago from working long hour shifts on her feet, 4-5 days a week. Working in a very fast-paced environment, it was difficult to take long breaks to sit down. Her pain grew worse over time. As soon as she got off work, she would have to sit down on her couch and place an ice pack on her lower back as she was in so much pain. Billy started to avoid any activities that involved being on her feet, even something as simple as a short walk down the block. Previously an avid hiker and active gym member, now she no longer found joy from activities that required her to stand or walk.

Billy's case isn't unique. 1 in 2 people suffer from musculoskeletal (MSK) pain in the US - many of them working in the retail industry. While MSK pain doesn't discriminate, it can be common in retail workforces due to the nature of the job and difficulty in accessing best-practice care.

Why is chronic pain so common in the retail industry?

We've all heard that sitting for too long is bad for your health, but standing for too long can be just as hard on your body. Retail industry workers, like Billy, can be on their feet all day. Long shifts mean that fatigue can set in and cause weight to shift unevenly on the low back, putting more pressure on them. In a fast-paced environment dealing with a high volume of customers, it can be difficult to make time to take regular sitting breaks. This puts retail workers at high risk for MSK pain.

In addition, long, irregular shifts can often be a barrier to accessing recommended conservative care. For example, physiotherapy can be challenging to fit into retail workers' schedules. For at-home regimens, research suggests that as few as 35 percent of physiotherapy patients adhere to what's recommended by their physiotherapist. This is because behaviour is difficult to change, and many workers face time constraints, lack the motivation, or simply forget.

Pain leads to avoidance behaviour which makes pain worse

As her pain got worse, Billy started to avoid activities that she once enjoyed out of fear of exacerbating her pain. This is extremely common for those suffering from chronic pain, and many buy in to the common myth that "rest is best". They slowly take on more and more sedentary lifestyles to try to avoid pain. But, the reality is that this can actually make pain worse. Movement lubricates the joints and while

you may feel some pain, it doesn't mean you are causing any harm to yourself. Over time, you will find that movement actually improves your pain in the long term.

When people with chronic pain avoid physical activity, it can often lead to isolation and avoidance of social activity, which can impact mental health. Pain and depression are very connected in regards to chronic MSK pain. Depression has been shown to increase the severity and intensity of pain, and chronic MSK pain increases the risk for depression. This feedback loop is known as the depression-pain dyad. Of people who have chronic pain, an average of 27% will experience depression compared to 5-10% of people without chronic pain. In addition, people with both chronic pain and depression can feel unmotivated to move, which makes their pain worse due to lack of movement.

How a digital care program helps retail workers in pain

Patients like Billy would benefit from the Digital Care Program offered at SquareONE Rehabilitation. While some things, such as her work environment, were out of her control, our health coach's can help take control of the things that she could - finding time and motivation for self-care despite her busy schedule. Educational articles can help her understand why movement is medicine, and the remote exercise therapy was easy to integrate into her routine.

SquareONE Rehabilitation offers the Digital Care Program as per the literature best practice for MSK care: exercise therapy, education, and behavioral health with unlimited 1-on-1 health coaching, which are needed to achieve clinically proven better long-term outcomes.

References

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