



## **The Do's and Don'ts of Acute Lumbar/Lower Back Disc Management**

### ***Do's***

- ✓ Review with a physiotherapist for a full assessment as soon as possible. Rehabilitation can start from day 1.
- ✓ Manage your pain – early and effective pain management, combined with the right physiotherapy will dramatically shorten your recovery time. These injuries nearly always have a significant inflammatory component to them, in combination with significant muscle spasm and pain. Multiple classes of medication have been shown to be useful in the early stages of this condition, with different classes of medication being effective for different people. Either make an appointment with your general practitioner for advice, or chat to your local pharmacist to find a combination that works for you. If the first option does not decrease your pain within 24 hours, organise a review to try an alternative.
- ✓ Ice – this has been shown to decrease pain and inflammation both by decreasing blood flow and by bombarding the neural pathway with an alternative stimulus.
- ✓ Keep breathing, don't hold your breath! –Continuing to breathe, even if it is extremely painful to move will decrease the intra-abdominal pressure, decreasing the pressure on the disc.
- ✓ Keep the large abdominals/stomach muscles relatively relaxed – bracing the abdominals will often aggravate the disc in the early stages.
- ✓ Recognise the signs of spinal cord compression and seek urgent medical attention – in rare circumstances, the spinal cord can be occluded by an acute disc prolapse. If you have leg symptoms (pain, pins and needles, numbness) on both sides at the same time, urinary or faecal incontinence or altered sensation in the saddle region, organise a review with your doctor as soon as possible, or go to the hospital.

### ***Don'ts***

- ✗ Bend first thing in the morning (first 1hr) – due to the pathology of the disc and the inflammatory cycle, these conditions are often more irritable first thing in the morning.
- ✗ Heat – this may increase the metabolism in this area in the early stages resulting in a greater inflammatory response. Heat may be appropriate once this pathology component reduces (usually after 5-7 days).
- ✗ Overdo car travel – try not to plan any long car trips (>20 minutes) in this acute period. The disc often does not like sitting for greater than this time period, and may be exacerbated by the vibration of the car.
- ✗ Panic! If these conditions are managed well from the beginning, the prognosis is often very good.