



Problem-solving Your Chronic Back Pain – Why Assessment Is Important

“Time spent in assessment will save time in treatment” – Dr. Vladimar Janda

There are three important factors to be considered in helping anyone with back pain:

1. Cause and effect
2. Treatment
3. Exercises

I deliberately placed ‘cause and effect’ as the first in our list of three and this is for good reason, which I will come to later, but let us for now talk about ‘treatment’ and ‘exercises’.

Before any treatment can be considered, I need to know what we are dealing with and how I can get you to where you want to be as soon as possible. This is where the assessment is of the utmost importance as we want to be efficient in outlining your treatment and rehabilitation journey.

The first part of this is for you to tell me how it started and when, where your symptoms are, what you find difficult to do and how you manage to give yourself relief if that’s possible.

From these initial pointers, I can then start to formulate some ideas in my mind about what we might be dealing with and I often describe this as either a ‘hardware’ issue, ‘software’ issue (see bottom of page for an example*) or both.

- ‘Hardware’: anything physical in your anatomy such as vertebra, disc, nerve, muscle, ligament, joint etc.
- ‘Software’: anything that requires ‘signals’ from your brain and nervous system that tells your ‘hardware’ how to move or process pain.

Next I need to perform an initial screening procedure and any special tests to see what you can and cannot do and whether you feel any pain or discomfort or whether you simply cannot do them at all. From here we should be able to put a good initial plan in to action that is specific to you and based on your own individual needs with a bespoke treatment and exercise rehabilitation plan in mind.

Now let me bring you back to the ‘cause and effect’ that I mentioned at the beginning.

(perhaps use the above as the intro in the newsletter and continue from below)

Treatment and exercise prescription will enhance your recovery processes, which is why you come to see us in the first place, but what if you are doing things that are harming your recovery as well?

Some things are quite clear and obvious to you, for example you might say that, *“every time I lift a heavy object, my back hurts”*. When you tell me this, I know that treatment and exercise might well help, but if you keep aggravating your back pain on a regular basis, it will take a lot longer to heal or may never settle down at all if you are damaging it on a regular basis.

So, if you do have something that you can quickly identify that causes your pain we really need to address that even before we start treatment. We want to take as many steps forwards in your recovery plan with as few steps backwards as possible to get you there quickly and safely.

If you do have chronic back pain that seems to ‘come and go’, you might be pleased to learn that this fits nicely in to our ‘cause and effect’ scenario and you have a better chance of recovery. If you are experiencing brief times without pain already, how can we maximise that for you?

What if we could find the key to why you have those good days and periods? What if we could find a way to string more of those good days and periods together to give you longer term relief? And all of this before you have even started your treatments?

It's not an easy task, but getting the assessment foundations in place and looking at the 'causes and effects' of your pain can not only get you there quicker, but can also help you manage your back health more efficiently over the longer term.

As the opening quotation said, "*Time spent in assessment will save time in treatment*", which I hope now makes a lot more sense for you.

**Here's a 'software' example for you: can you write as well with your non-dominant hand? Most people cannot. Why not? Have you had an injury that prevents you? Or do you simply not have the dexterity and control?*

This is of course a 'software' example – you just don't have the skill to do it and if you worked at it, it would likely improve. This process can also be translated to the way that you use and move your back – if you have poor back control, we can usually improve it with movement control skills.