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Nonspecific Low Back Pain and Return to Work

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As many as 90% of persons with occupational nonspecific low back pain are able to return to work in a relatively short period of time. As long as no "red flags" exist, the patient should be encouraged to remain as active as possible, minimize bed rest, use ice or heat compresses, take anti-inflammatory or analgesic medications if desired, participate in home exercises, and return to work as soon as possible. Medical and surgical intervention should be minimized when abnormalities on physical examination are lacking and the patient is having difficulty returning to work after four to six weeks. Personal and occupational psychosocial factors should be addressed thoroughly, and a multidisciplinary rehabilitation program should be strongly considered to prevent delayed recovery and chronic disability. Patient advocacy should include preventing unnecessary and ineffective medical and surgical interventions, prolonged work loss, joblessness, and chronic disability.