

SAFEGUARDING YOUTH IN THE SPORT OF ROWING

COACH MANAGEMENT OF ROWING RELATED LOW BACK PAIN

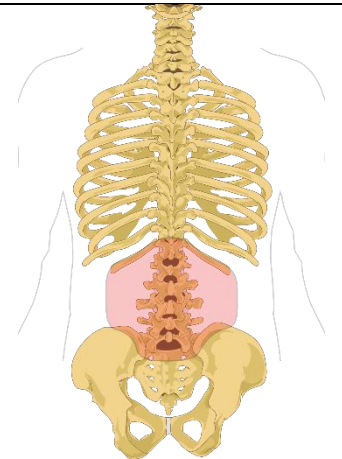
Low Back Pain / Injury is common in all levels of rowing. Most of the time this injury is not serious and will resolve fully. It is important for rowing coaches to know when it is safe for a rower to be in the boat if they have experienced an episode of low back pain.

Definition of low back pain / injury

The low back / lower spine is defined as the region between the lower margin of the ribs and the top of the pelvis.

Low Back Pain is defined as being in the region of the low back +/- pain radiating into one or both buttocks and/or one or both legs. The radiation of pain is most often a referral of pain from the low back and is an indication of low back injury.

Low Back Pain is considered an injury when the rowers cannot perform their usual movement or their usual training due to pain.



If the rower has the following features of low back pain, they should stop and seek medical advice:

- Pain that gets increasingly worse when rowing
- Sharp pain in the region of the low back or a shooting pain into the buttocks or legs
- Pain that lasts for more than 30min after rowing
- An inability to keep rowing / performing scheduled training due to pain

Who should a rower see if they have pain?

- A Doctor or Physiotherapist with rowing specific knowledge is ideal.

What should the rower expect?

An unloading from aggravating activities such as rowing and ergometer training but this may also include the avoidance of sitting (eg. exercise bike or long study periods) and shock absorbing exercises (running).

- Instruction to stay active (eg. walking, elliptical trainer) and the use of simple techniques to reduce pain (eg. lying on belly with heat-pack on back) or using simple pain relief medication
- Simple exercises that can reduce muscle splinting around the low back region and help activate muscles that may have become inhibited / turned off in the presence of pain.

How long should the rower rest?

- Most episodes of low back pain require 2-4 days' rest from aggravating activities and a build back into rowing over a similar time period.
- When rowers persist with pain, the injury can become more severe.
- More serious episodes of low back pain that have features of leg pain or significant injury that can be detected on a clinical examination could require a rest period of up to 6 weeks.
- Occasionally, a rower can experience a severe episode of low back pain when rowing and has to stop immediately, this can be indicative of an injury that can take longer.

Important note:

- Most rowers will experience discomfort in the region of the lower back when rowing from time to time, this is due to the large forces transmitted through the lower spine.
- Discomfort in the low back area that comes and goes from time to time, does not increase in intensity, is not worse after rowing and does not interfere with how the rower is moving can be tolerated.

How do I return a rower to the boat after a low back injury?

- Adhere to advice given to the rower from a medical or health care practitioner.
- A trial ergometer row is a great place to start as the rower can discontinue if pain increases.
- A lighter first row back on the water can be achieved by:
 - A rower in the middle of a bigger boat (stroke seat is often more loaded)
 - Having the rower do a shorter row (not ideal to be sitting in the coach boat before or after though, so this can be tricky logistically)
 - Ensuring the rate is kept up (low rates often results in increased loads)
 - Avoiding starts or power strokes (this includes only 2 rowers rowing in a 4- or 8-)
 - Avoiding poor weather conditions
 - Avoiding putting injured rowers together in the one boat, they will load each other.
- Ask the rower how they are feeling during the row and after the row (as per above recommendations) and observe to see if they are moving as they usually do.

Rowers who row with pain often splint with some muscles and experience inhibition of other muscles around the low back and pelvis, rowing with pain = reduced performance, it is always better to get early control of pain with an aggressive unload rather than trying to continue.

A culture of openness and understanding between coaches, athletes, parents, and health care practitioners fosters best care and reduces time lost to injury.

Rowers should never be made to row when injured.

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