Natural Course of Low Back Pain

Almost 800 adults participated in this study of low back pain (LBP). There were two goals:

- Observe the natural course of LBP over five years
- See if people who exercise recover faster than those who don't

There aren't very many studies to follow the natural history or course of LBP beyond the first two years. The natural course of a condition or illness describes what happens over time.

In this study, pain and disability were the main measures used to compare men and women with LBP. Patients were also asked about physical activity including physical exercise, sports, and leisure activities. The patients were divided into three groups based on intensity and duration of exercise reported. The groups were low exercise, medium exercise, and high exercise.

The researchers found that compared to women, men had lower intensity pain at the time of the initial back pain incident. Women in the high-exercise group also had lower pain compared to the low or medium exercise groups. Women in the medium exercise group tend to have more pain, which keeps them from exercising more.

Both sexes had the same amount of disability. Most of the improvements in pain and function occurred in the first six months. The authors concluded that the natural history of LBP is about the same for men and women. Regular exercise (not specific back exercises) doesn't seem to help speed up recovery.