

Ferreira PH, Pinheiro MB, Machado GC, et al. Is alcohol intake associated with low back pain? A systematic review of observational studies. Manual Therapy 2013;18(3):183-90

A range of risk factors exist for low back pain, and these have been widely described in the literature. Alcohol is known to be a risk factor for a variety of diseases but a growing number of studies have suggested its contribution to low back pain. A range of studies have been published on this topic including one systematic review (Lebouef-Yde, 2000) and some observational studies (Khatun et al, 2004; Hestbaek et al, 2006; Almeida et al, 2008).

This systematic review explored the relationship between alcohol intake and low back pain. A range of studies were examined following an extensive search of the literature; 833 studies were initially identified but 26 met the inclusion criteria for review and meta-analysis. Among the included studies were 23 retrospective cohorts, 2 case controls, and one longitudinal study.

The results from the case control and cohort studies were pooled and showed that alcohol consumption is slightly associated with low back pain (Odds Ratio: 1.3; 95% Confidence Interval: 1.1-1.5). While this association appeared to be present in studies where alcohol had been identified as an abuse dependent substance in chronic low back pain patients, remaining individual studies reported no statistical association.

The reviewers concluded that the findings could be used to design educational information for populations experiencing low back pain associated with alcohol abuse.