

Back Skills Training (BeST) Programme
A group cognitive behavioural approach for
people with persistent back pain

Presented by Dr Esther Williamson
on behalf of the BeST Implementation Team

BeST Implementation Team



Professor Sallie Lamb (Chief Investigator)



Dr Zara Hansen



Dr Helen Richmond



Dr Priya Sugavanam



Dr Bethan Copsey



Dr Beth Fordham



Dr Pippa Nicolson



Dr Esther Williamson



Andy Williamson



Usama Ali



Oliver Conway



Graham Boniface



Lucy Cridland-Smith

The problem of low back pain



Everyday



In the last month

The financial cost of back pain in the UK:

£3.8 billion in lost production

80 million lost working days

“People need help to live better with their pain, without prescription drugs”

Underwood and Tysall 2021

NICE guidelines

“Consider **psychological therapies using a cognitive behavioural approach** for managing low back pain with or without sciatica but only as **part of a treatment package including exercise**, with or without manual therapy (spinal manipulation, mobilisation or soft tissue techniques such as massage)”

Research – practice gap

The National Spinal Taskforce

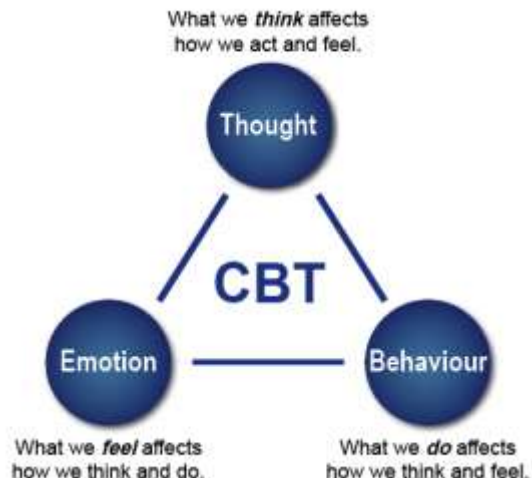
Identified patient access to a combined psychological and physical treatment programme as the largest gap in the UK spinal services.



Applying a CB approach to back pain

Back pain can lead to unhelpful **thinking** such as
“hurt = harm”

These thoughts then influence how a person **acts**
and feels.



Aims of the BeST programme:

To “undo” unhelpful beliefs people have about back pain

Provide skills and motivation to become more active, despite pain.

Focuses on:

- re-evaluating thinking

- reducing the use of passive coping strategies

- promoting helpful behavioural responses

The BeST Programme

Initial one to one session

- Clinical assessment
- Goal setting
- Home exercises



60 minutes



Group sessions X 6

- Understanding pain
- Overcoming unhelpful thoughts & behaviours
- Baseline setting & pacing
- Role of exercise in managing LBP
- Relaxation exercises

90 minutes
each



Exercises

During the 1:1 session each patient is provided with a home exercise programme.

Reviewed during the group as required.

Increasing physical activity is a key focus of the groups.

Hamstring Stretch

Back Twist

Back Arching

Back Bending

Sit to Stand

Tummy Curls

The Bridge

BeST Trial – does it work?

701 adults with troublesome sub-acute or chronic low-back pain recruited from 56 general practices.

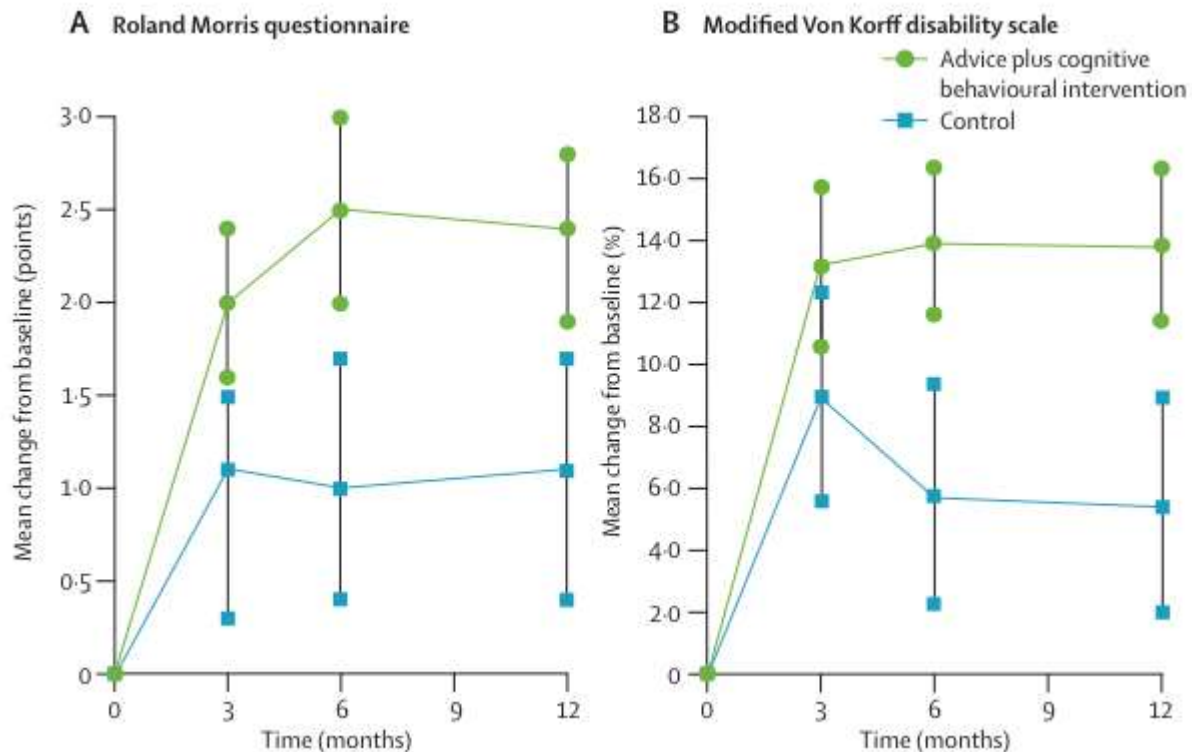
All received active management advice.

2/3 also received the Back Skills Training Programme.

Primary outcomes: Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire and modified Von Korff scores at 12 months.



Does it work?



Does it work?

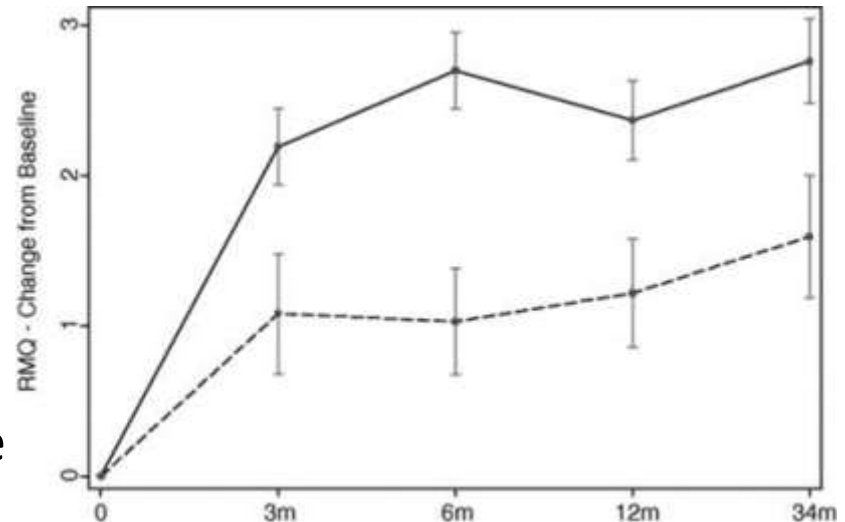
Clinically effective at improving function at 12 months

Effects were maintained at longer term follow up.

It is also cost-effective.

Complete health care costs over one year BeST = £228

A standard package of physiotherapy for low back pain = £274 to £476



Group cognitive behavioural treatment for low-back pain in primary care: a randomised controlled trial and cost-effectiveness analysis

Sarah E Lamb, Zara Parnian, Ranjit La, Emanuela Castellanova, Emma Withers, Vivien Nichols, Rachel Potter, Martin R Underwood, on behalf of the Back Skills Training Trial investigators*

THE LANCET

Implementation



Back Skills Training - online course

Accessible & low cost.

The initial version was developed by *Dr Helen Richmond*.

The enhanced version was launched in March 2016.





Physiotherapy 109 (2020) 4–12

Physiotherapy

Evaluation of the implementation of the Back Skills Training (BeST) programme using online training: a cohort implementation study



NIHR Collaboration for Leadership
in Applied Health Research
and Care Oxford

Thavapriya Sugavanam^{a,b}, Esther Williamson^a, Beth Fordham^a, Zara Hansen^a,
Helen Richmond^c, Amanda Hall^c, Usama Ali^b, Bethan Copsey^a,
Sarah E. Lamb^{d,*}

1324
clinicians
from 157
NHS Trusts
registered
for training

586 course
completers
101 NHS
Trusts

Service
evaluation
34 Physio
Depts across
21 NHS Trusts

160 BeST
groups
923
patients

Training outcomes

Clinical outcomes

Training outcomes

On training completion:

- 98% felt confident about their ability to implement the programme
- 52% felt confident in their capability to implement the programme
- 57% intended to implement the programme

6 month follow up:

- 148 participants responded
- 1/3 had run at least one group from 27 Trusts

Potential barriers/actual barriers:

- Lack of suitable patients ~ patient drop-out and reluctance to attend
- Space to run groups
- Staff capacity/time to introduce change ~ lack of managerial & organisation support ~ Funding issues

Clinical outcomes

	Pain (0-10)		Function (0-10) Patient Specific Functional Scale	
	Mean change (95% CI)	Effect size (95% CI)	Mean change (95% CI)	Effect size (95% CI)
Post treatment (n=627)	-1.12* (-1.28 to -0.96)	0.55 (0.47 to 0.63)	2* (1.83 to 2.18)	0.89 (0.80 to 0.98)
3 month (n=502)	-0.91* (-1.11 to -0.71)	0.40 (0.31 to 0.49)	1.98* (1.71 to 2.25)	0.71 (0.58 to 0.84)
12 month (n=358)	-0.84* (-1.1 to -0.58)	0.34 (0.23 to 0.45)	1.55* (1.25 to 1.86)	0.56 (0.42 to 0.71)




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Cognitive Behavioural Skills to Treat Back Pain: The Back Skills Training (BeST) Programme

★★★★★ 4.6 (23 reviews)

Learn an evidence-based, cognitive behavioural approach to manage low back pain with this CPD course for health professionals.

[Go to course](#)

1,207 enrolled on this course



Report

What is needed to run the BeST programme?

Complete the FutureLearn Training

Support from senior staff and management is vital

Equipment and space

- A flipchart or whiteboard

- Seating for up to 10 patients

- A space where you can check exercises at breaktime



Frequently asked questions

How do I select patients to take part in the BeST programme?

Suitable for anyone with back pain for 6 weeks or more.

How many people in the group?

We recommend ~6 patients.

Sites tend to book 8-10 into the group to ensure you always have good numbers.

Frequently asked questions

Is the 1 to 1 session necessary?

Yes, it build rapport and allows you to identify unhelpful beliefs that need to be addressed during the group.

Individualised home exercises and set goals.

Can I adapt the programme?

We have only tested it's effectiveness in the current format but some sites have successfully made adaptations.

Frequently asked questions

Should only experienced therapists run the groups?

No. More experienced staff may be more confident to deliver the programme but no difference in effectiveness based on grade of staff.

Consider supporting less experienced staff during their first group e.g. buddy system.

Staff need to be enthusiastic about using a cognitive behavioural approach.

Frequently asked questions

Can we run the groups online?

Some sites are running the groups online (via Teams).

We can provide Powerpoint slides.

Adapted exercises to make them easier to demonstrate online.

Need to include information about how to access the groups online in the one to one session.

Send out patient workbook prior to the group.

Have offered telephone calls to people if access problems.

The Back Skills Training Class was one of the **most useful things** I have ever done in terms of **support and management of my back pain**. Firstly, it was nice to not feel so alone in my struggles by **seeing & hearing about similar problems from other people** It was nice to have a new and **empowering way** of looking at dealing with it. The new feeling of **being in control** certainly started from the training and I know this will continue.

Contact details

esther.williamson@ndorms.ox.ac.uk

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/cbt-for-back-pain>

Thank you for listening