



One of the most common conditions we see in Tokyo Physio is lower back pain (LBP), and we don't need to recite figures to convince people that it is a very common condition. The link between long periods sitting and lower back pain is also very well established and of no surprise to anyone. Having spent my own career mostly standing on my feet and largely active in my spare time I'd been lucky enough to have never experienced an episode of the dreaded LBP myself. It was somewhat of a revolutionary experience for me then, when in April this year I got struck down with a reasonably acute episode of lower back pain after a long drive on and end-of-season snowboarding road-trip in Hokkaido. 'Damn – this is what LBP feels like – it does suck!', I thought, but in a strange way a part of me was very curious to have finally experienced what I had spent so long studying, treating and talking about.

My pain came on after a 6 hour drive to central Hokkaido, where three of us powder lovers were searching for some late season fresh snow. I was wiped off my feet pretty sharply, and as so many of my patients had been in the past I was unable to put my socks on without performing a lasso technique and tying my shoe laces took about five minutes. Talk about forcing yourself to slow down. One of the major breakthroughs in lower back pain research recently is several studies showing that continuing on with your day to day movements and duties is better than staying still or bed-rest. It is something we have been recommending to all our patients and is often met with suspicion, from patients possibly looking forward to some time off work and some TLC by loved ones on the couch. This is an even harder sell when doctors recommend prolonged bed-rest for all their back pain patients. We had one patient with what sounded like a reasonably mild case of lower back pain come to us after spending two months in bed on the orders of a local doctor, he went back to the doctor after one month and reported he was still a little tender and was told to spend another month in bed.

Anyway, back to Hokkaido - there I was at 3am pacing up and down hallways in an Asahidake hotel room at 3am thinking about carrying on with my 'regular daily activities'. Now, can I class snowboarding through tight trees on ungroomed resorts as a 'regular activity'? The urge to spend the day in the hotel moping around was very strong, and I almost convinced myself it was beyond me. It's funny when you're in the midst of such an affliction how all-encompassing it can be and how you think you'll never be 'normal' again, and vow you'll never take periods of full health for granted in the future. However, I wanted to see if what I had been preaching all these years was really correct, so I decided to head out. Despite not being able to do up my own bindings (my buddies got tired of that duty, but resolutely performed it at the top of every run), I was able to really enjoy the day, even though I was only able to ride at about 70% capacity. After four days of treatments from my wife I was still sleeping only a few hours a night with pain, but I kept snowboarding and was able to really enjoy my trip.

At the end of the trip within a week my pain was completely gone. Now I don't share this anecdote to boast about my brave snowboarding in the face of pain, (well OK maybe a little bit) but more to try and continue to spread the word – if you are struck down with lower back pain – keep moving as much as you can!

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