

Pain characteristic differences between subacute and chronic back pain

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Back pain is commonly classified based on duration. However, there is limited information regarding differences in clinical features between these duration-based subgroups. Here, we compared the pain characteristics of patients with subacute (SBP; pain 7-12 weeks, n = 40) and chronic back pain (CBP; pain ≥ 1year, n = 37). CBP patients reported significantly higher pain intensity on the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) compared to SBP patients. Based on this finding, we investigated group differences and their dependence on VAS for the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), sensory and affective dimensions of the McGill Pain Questionnaire (MPQ-S and MPQ-A), Neuropathic Pain Scale (NPS) and the variability of spontaneous pain. Correction for VAS abolished significant group differences on the MPQ-S, MPQ-A and NPS. Only a significant difference in the variability of spontaneous pain was independent of VAS. Finally, SBP and CBP groups differed in the location of pain radiating down the legs and/or buttocks. Whereas SBP patients displayed a higher incidence of unilateral radiating pain, there was a shift towards more bilateral pain in CBP patients. In summary, we found that SBP and CBP groups differed with respect to three independent parameters: VAS ratings, the temporal dynamics of spontaneous pain and the location of pain.