

### **Extended Research Article**

# Supporting self-management with an internet intervention for low back pain in primary care: a RCT (SupportBack 2)

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## Plain language summary

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# **Plain language summary**

Low back pain is very common; most people will experience it at some point in their lives. For some, it will limit what they do day-to-day and cause a lot of concern. The advice people with low back pain are often given is to keep themselves active and 'self-manage'. This means working those things in their lives that will be helpful for alleviating their pain. However, often self-managing well, can require support.

In this study, we wanted to know whether a website built to help people self-manage was more effective when added to the care people usually receive from their doctor. We also wanted to know whether adding phone calls from a physiotherapist made the website more effective. Finally, we explored whether these options would represent 'good value for money' for the National Health Service.

People with low back pain were randomly split into three groups. Group one had access to normal care from their doctor; group two had access to normal care from their doctor plus access to a self-management website; group three had access to normal care from their doctor, plus access to the website, and three brief calls from a physiotherapist. As per our main focus, they answered questions about their back-pain-related disability at 4 time points, over 12 months.

We found small reductions in disability between both website groups and the group who received normal care from their doctor over 12 months. These differences were not significantly different and were smaller than those we judged to be clinically important. However, the website did not cause harm and was likely to offer value for money.

Overall, although the impact of the website on disability was limited, it was safe and could be accessed by a lot of people. Clinicians will need to balance these findings on impact, with access, safety and costs when deciding to offer the website.

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#### **This article**

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