

Scoring the Oswestry Disability Index

The Oswestry Disability Index (aka the Oswestry Low Back Pain Disability Questionnaire) is an extremely important tool that researchers and disability evaluators use to measure a patient's permanent functional disability. The test has been around since 1980 and is considered the 'gold standard' of low back pain functional outcome tools.

INSTRUCTIONS:

For each question, there is a possible 5 points; 0 for the first answer, 1 for the second answer, etc. Add up the total for the 10 questions and rate them on the scale at right.

SCORE

DISABILITY LEVEL

0 - 4

No disability

5 - 14

Mild disability

15 - 24

Moderate disability

25 - 34

Severe disability

35 - 50

Completely disabled

No disability

The patient can cope with most living activities. Usually no treatment is indicated apart from advice on lifting, sitting and exercise.

Mild disability

The patient experiences more pain and difficulty with sitting, lifting and standing. Travel and social life are more difficult and they may be disabled from work. Personal care, sexual activity and sleeping are not grossly affected and the patient can usually be managed by conservative means.

Moderate disability

Pain remains the main problem in this group but activities of daily living are affected. These patients require a detailed investigation.

Severe disability

Back pain impinges on all aspects of the patient's life. Positive intervention is required.

Completely disabled

These patients are either bed-bound or are exaggerating their symptoms.

WHY BOTHER WITH AN OUTCOMES MEASURE?

As physical therapy works towards autonomous practice and incorporating evidence-based medicine into it's practice, it is imperative that therapists utilize measuring tools which have been validated through research.

Insurance companies and physicians are very familiar with these instruments and are asking for scores such as Oswestry.

REFERENCES:

- Fairbank JC, Pynsent PB. "The Oswestry Disability Index." *Spine* 2000; 25(22):2940-2952
- Fairbank JCT, Couper J, Davies JB. "The Oswestry Low Back Pain Questionnaire." *Physiotherapy* 1980; 66:271-273