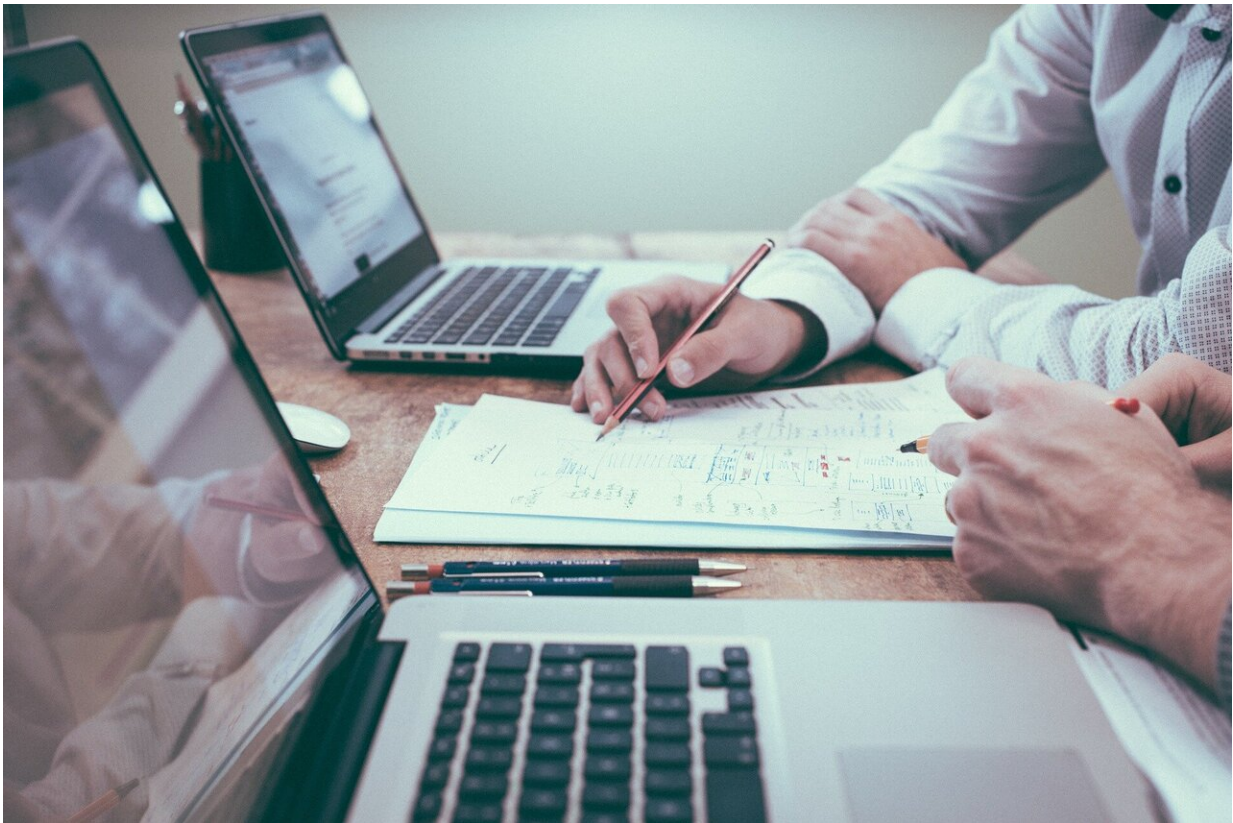


# More autonomy at work reduces the risk of low back pain

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A team of psychologists from Technische Universität Dresden, in cooperation with experts from health sciences and the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, has carried out a meta-analysis to

identify psychosocial work factors that pose a risk for the development of chronic low back pain (CLBP). Their study clearly indicates that not only physical but also psychological and social factors exert considerable influence on the development of the disease.

Worldwide, more than 23 percent of the population suffer from [chronic low back pain](#) (CLBP). This makes CLBP the most prevalent chronic pain disorder, associated with immense costs to the health care system. The problems are often attributed to risks at the workplace, but are usually related to physical factors such as incorrect posture or sitting for too long. In a meta-analysis, researchers from TU Dresden were able to show that psychosocial areas of work life such as workload, job control and [social support](#) significantly contribute to the development of the disease, as well.

For the analysis, the team synthesized more than 19,000 [data sets](#) from 18 studies investigating associations between psychosocial areas of work life and CLBP. The results of this review revealed robust evidence of an association between exposures to work-related psychosocial risk factors and CLBP: "People with a high workload suffered more frequently from chronic low back pain. Employees with more job control were less affected. It was also shown that back pain was lower when people received social support at work from their superiors and colleagues," explains social psychologist Dr. Anne Tomaschek.

"These data provide an important basis for the development of prevention programs," says Dr. Denise Dörfel, postdoc at the Chair of Work and Organisational Psychology. "In view of the increasing burden and high costs of CLBP for individuals, employers and society, this meta-analysis provides important insights for public health and human resource management. A redesign of working conditions could reduce pain-related absenteeism. Flexible breaks, more autonomy in scheduling the work, all this reduces the workload," explains the psychologist.

"Social support from colleagues and more feedback and recognition from superiors may also help."

**More information:** Gabriele Buruck et al. Psychosocial areas of worklife and chronic low back pain: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s12891-019-2826-3](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12891-019-2826-3)

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