

The Backstretcher®

Back complaints are an enormous medical, social and economic problem. The Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (=CBS, Dutch Central Statistical Office) concluded in its most recent report with regard to chronic disorders, that chronic back complaints can be found in third place with some 800,000 people suffering from them¹. In the (working) age group of 35-65 years old, it is the most common disorder.

By order of the Ziekenfondsraad (Dutch Medical Insurance Board), the Vrije Universiteit (Free University of Amsterdam) calculated that the social cost involved with chronic back complaints is conservatively estimated at 9.3 billion Dutch guilders a year². Of this amount, 700 million is spent on primary medical costs and 8.6 billion is consumed by claims to social legislation and loss of productivity.

The College toezicht sociale verzekeringen (=Ctsv, Dutch Board for Control of Social Insurances) concluded, as part of a long-term international study, that 50% of the people who end up in the ZW/WAO (Dutch Health Law/Dutch Disablement Insurance Act), already suffered from back complaints with a negative effect on the work performance, two years before their resignation³. This conclusion is not only significant because it gives insight into the loss of productivity, but also because the results of the study suggest that taking away "work restricting" back complaints should contribute to keeping the people in question working.

Reason enough to extend the available arsenal for fighting back complaints and the socio-economic problems that go along with them.

From epidemiological data about non-specific back complaints, it becomes clear that in approximately 75% of the cases there is intensified thoracic kyphosis and the hypertonia of the paravertebral muscles that goes along with it. The Backstretcher is a wooden back bench with an antikyphotic and muscle-relaxing effect. In this way, it deals with the most common aetiological factors of backpain . The Backstretcher was developed in England by the kinesio-therapist Neil Summers, in cooperation with several orthopaedic surgeons and physiotherapists, in which the optimum form has been established along the path of clinical empiricism. The Backstretcher is used by lying on it for fifteen minutes a day, which means this is a passive form of therapy. The Backstretcher was successfully brought onto the market in England at the beginning of 1995 and won several important awards, such as The Best New Health & Medical Product⁴.

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1. First impression of the working mechanism⁵ (survey)

The Backstretcher was demonstrated to 663 physiotherapists and manual therapists, the indication "non-specific back complaints" was mentioned and they were asked for their first impression:

First impression	Respondents	Conclusion:
		The first impression of the experts is positive. The most valuable factor is that only 13% of the 663 respondents have a negative impression. This can, incidentally, be explained by the different movements within the occupational group.
