

Yellow Flags-Psychological Indicators

Yellow flags are psychosocial indicators suggesting an increased risk of progression to long-term distress, disability and potential drug misuse. They include the patient's attitudes and beliefs, emotions, behaviours, and family and work place factors

Work place

- belief that all pain must be abolished before attempting to return to work or normal activity
- expectation/fear of increased pain with activity/work
- poor work history
- unsupportive work environment

Attitudes and beliefs

- belief that pain is harmful, resulting in avoidance and poor compliance with exercise
- catastrophising, thinking the worst
- misinterpreting bodily symptoms
- belief that pain is uncontrollable
- expectation of 'techno-fix' for pain

Social/family

- overprotective partner/spouse
- socially punitive partner/spouse
- lack of support to talk about problems

Behaviours

- passive approach to rehabilitation
- use of extended rest
- reduced activity with withdrawal from activities of daily living
- avoidance of normal activity
- impaired sleep because of pain
- increased intake of alcohol or similar substances since the onset of pain

Affective/emotions

- depression
- feeling useless
- irritability
- anxiety about heightened body sensations
- disinterest in social activity

Reference: New Zealand acute low back pain guide: Incorporating the guide to assessing psychological yellow flags in acute low back pain. Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) Wellington, 2004. (Sourced 24/2/14) http://www.acc.co.nz/PRD_EXT_CSMP/groups/external_ip/documents/internet/wcm002131.pdf