

## Traditional Exercise Approaches

The two best known exercise programs for dealing with back pain problems are the Williams and the McKenzie protocols. A glance at the accompanying figures illustrates that they are opposite approaches: Williams uses flexion or forward bends, while McKenzie uses extension or back bends.

Dr. Paul Williams first published his exercise program in 1937. It was intended for use with patients showing decreased disc space in the lumbar region, with chronic but not severe symptoms. It became widely used by physiotherapists and brought relief to a large number of clients.

Robin McKenzie, a New Zealand physical therapist, noted that flexion exercises did not address the needs of all back patients. In the 1960's he developed a back routine based on extension exercises.

Why such different approaches?  
Because the reasons for back pain arise from a variety of different conditions!

## The McKenzie Protocol

Fig. 4.1



The McKenzie method may be beneficial in cases where the back problem is due to a disc that has moved backwards, it is bulging and perhaps pressing on a nerve. However, for patients with spinal stenosis, inflamed facet joints, spondylolysis, and especially spondylolisthesis, extending the spine will likely aggravate the problem.

## The Williams Protocol



Fig. 4.2

The Williams method may be useful for those having facet joint problems, and spinal stenosis.

However, if the pain is coming from disc problems or damaged ligaments, flexion will likely make things worse.

Treating all patients, even those that have been diagnosed with the same condition, with a single therapy protocol is not effective.

The prescribed therapy must be appropriate and adjusted for each individual on a day-by-day basis.