

RED AND YELLOW FLAGS

Red flags are clinical indicators of possible **serious underlying conditions** requiring further medical intervention. Red flags were designed for use in acute low back pain, but the underlying concept can be applied more broadly in the search for serious underlying pathology in any pain presentation.

Yellow flags are **psychosocial indicators** suggesting increased risk of progression to long-term distress, disability and pain. Yellow flags were also designed for use in acute low back pain. In principle they can be applied more broadly to assess likelihood of development of persistent problems from any acute pain presentation.

Yellow flags can relate to the patient's attitudes and beliefs, emotions, behaviours, family, and workplace. The behaviour of health professionals can also have a major influence.

Key factors in low back pain are:

- The belief that pain is harmful or severely disabling
- Fear-avoidance behaviour (avoiding activity because of fear of pain)
- Low mood and social withdrawal
- Expectation that passive treatment rather than active participation will help.