

SPINAL MANIPULATIVE THERAPY

CLINICAL QUESTION

Is spinal manipulative therapy safe and effective in the management of chronic non-malignant low back pain \geq 3 months' duration?

THE EVIDENCE

Treatment	Condition	Comparator	Relevant Results/Authors' Conclusions [#]
Spinal manipulative therapy [†]	Chronic non-malignant low back pain	Short wave diathermy, acupuncture, back school, NSAIDs, physiotherapy, placebo, or no treatment	<p>Moderate evidence that there is no difference between spinal manipulative therapy and sham treatment with respect to reducing pain.</p> <p>Moderate evidence that spinal manipulative therapy is as effective as NSAIDs in reducing disability.</p> <p>Unable to determine if spinal manipulative therapy is more effective than NSAIDs in reducing pain.</p> <p>Unable to determine if spinal manipulative therapy is more effective than all other treatment comparisons.</p> <p>None of the included trials reported adverse events.</p>

[†]Based on one **GOOD***, three **AVERAGE***, and four **POOR*** quality randomised or quasi-randomised controlled trials, published between 1978 and 1999; [#]Refer to Grading Key document for explanation of evidence grading; NSAIDs – non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

What we don't know:

- Is spinal manipulative therapy more effective than non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) in reducing pain?
- Is spinal manipulative therapy more effective than short wave diathermy, acupuncture, back school, physiotherapy, or no treatment?
- Is spinal manipulative therapy safe?

Research Evidence: What we know

In patients with chronic low back pain, evidence indicates that spinal manipulative therapy:

- is no more effective than sham treatment in reducing pain;
- is no more effective than NSAIDs in improving disability scores.

Recommendation from Clinical Ambassadors

The research evidence available to date is insufficient to support the use of spinal manipulative therapy as a treatment for chronic low back pain. While clinically we sometimes see improvements with this treatment, there isn't yet enough evidence to predict those in whom it is likely to be successful. Extended trials without benefit are not warranted.

Acute low back pain was not the focus of this systematic review, so the efficacy of spinal manipulative therapy for acute low back pain is not addressed.

The Clinical Ambassadors: Dr Ted Findlay, Dr Saifee Rashid, Dr Chris Spanswick, Dr Paul Taenzer

revised April 2009

Reference: This Evidence Brief is based on results from an **AVERAGE*** quality systematic review (SR).
Ferreira ML, Ferreira PH, Latimer J, Herbert R, Maher C. Does spinal manipulative therapy help people with chronic low back pain?
Australian Journal of Physiotherapy 2002;48:277-84.

*Quality ratings for RCTs & SR: Good ● Average ● Poor ●

[Key to Evidence Gradings](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Methodology](#)