

Non-Surgical Treatment for Lower Back Pain

"Conservative treatment" is a common term used to describe the different types of non-surgical treatments. Since almost all people who have spine-related problems do not require surgery, conservative treatments play a major role in dealing with spinal disorders. However, there are wide selections of conservative treatments available, and sometimes it can be very difficult to make sense of all the choices.

It is very important to consider the appropriate conservative treatment for your spine, and this section is specifically designed to provide you with a review of how different health-care professionals, including osteopaths, chiropractors, and physiotherapists approach spinal disorders. This information will aid in your decision of who might help you and who you may want to consult with first.

Conservative treatment is always the first option in order to reduce pain. The most common form of treatment is physical therapy.

Physical therapy offers a wide range of treatments for back problems. Physical therapy treatments have four main goals:

- Relieve pain
- Accelerate natural healing processes
- Increase strength and flexibility of back muscles and ligaments
- Help prevent future episodes of back pain

Types of treatment used by the professionals will depend on the nature of the condition being treated. Some treatments have not been proven scientifically but can still be helpful in certain individuals. These treatments include:

- Flexibility and strengthening exercise programs- These types of programs are important for keeping the lower back muscles flexible and strong. They are among the main safeguards for preventing future back injuries. It is important to begin slowly and progress as tolerated, using pain as your guide. The old adage "no pain, no gain" is not the rule of thumb for the recovery of back pain.
- Heat- Heat usually is applied when there is a small area of tissue damage or inflammation. Electrical currents can be used to relieve pain and also to stimulate circulation in the deeper tissues.
- Hydrotherapy- Hydrotherapy involves the use of water to treat physical disorders and may include baths, spas, pools, or shower sprays.
- Electrical nerve stimulation- This includes transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), in which electrodes are placed on the back to gently stimulate nerves and helps alleviate pain. TENS appears to be helpful for some people with spinal stenosis, but has not otherwise been found to be generally helpful. An alternative version delivers the electrical stimulation through acupuncture needles. Treatment generally consists of 45 minute sessions three times a day. Most people hardly feel the electrical sensation.
- Tissue mobilization and massage techniques- Massage and a variety of soft tissue mobilization techniques are being used more often by therapists who specialize in manual therapy. These techniques may be helpful to increase circulation to the area, release muscle spasms, and stretch back tissues.

- Traction- Traction, or spinal stretching, equipment has been used to help decrease pressure on the nerve roots and provide a stretch to tight muscles in the back. Spinal traction has been well recognized since ancient times as an effective treatment for various spinal disorders.
- Back education- This involves teaching proper posture and lifting techniques as part of a total back care program. This information helps people to adapt and adopt the right attitudes about the body and its functional use.