

Manual therapy for low back pain

Acute back pain is very common. Your doctor has probably reassured you that there is no dangerous cause for your back pain. Your back most likely will get better on its own in a few days. It may take 2 to 3 weeks, however. A day or two of bed rest and a few painkiller pills are all that you need to recover. Doing simple exercises may help too. Do not stay in bed more than 2 days. Studies show that this makes back pain worse. You will get better faster if you return to regular activities soon.

Sometimes patients and/or physicians consider additional treatment with manual therapy. This type of therapy can include osteopathic manipulation, chiropractic therapy, physical therapy, or massage. If you want to use any of these manual therapies for your back pain, find out the facts. Some health insurance companies pay for manual therapy and others do not. If you have to pay out of your own pocket, manual therapy can be expensive.

If you have already received manual therapy and it has helped, you may want to continue. Make sure you are not paying for too many sessions. Do not be talked into more treatments than you think you need. Do not continue therapy if the adjustments hurt. Here is some information about types of manual therapy.

■ **Osteopathic manipulation** Osteopathic physicians have the initials DO after their name.

They have gone to medical schools similar to those attended by physicians who have MD after their name. The manual therapy they perform has been proven to be safe and effective.

■ **Chiropractic** Chiropractors treat pain in the muscles and joints with spinal manipulation.

They cannot prescribe medications. Do not allow x-rays to be taken by practitioners who offer them for free. X-rays cannot show the problem that spinal manipulation is used to fix.

Find out if the chiropractor you want to see belongs to the National Association for Chiropractic Medicine. A member of this organization is likely, but not guaranteed, to be reputable. Members recognize that they are not licensed to practice medicine.

■ **Physical therapy and massage** Although many people use these services, very few medical studies have been done on them. Physical therapy includes manual therapy that is applied to joints and offers exercises that may help relieve back pain. Many kinds of massage are available, but it is not known how they affect back pain.

■ **Psychological counseling** This is not a manual therapy, but it may help if you are not able to cope with your back pain. Studies show that people with back pain that does not go away quickly are more likely to be stressed from problems at home and on the job.

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