

Thinking Outside the Medicine Cabinet: Non-Drug Ways to Manage Chronic Pain

CADTH completed a series of evidence reviews to appraise and summarize the research on the effectiveness of non-drug methods for the treatment of chronic, non-cancer pain. These reviews were used to develop a series of printable patient handouts and clinician evidence summaries, which can be found at cadth.ca/chronicpain. Clinician summaries include “practical considerations,” which are useful tips and strategies for recommending the use of each non-drug method to patients.

Evidence Bottom Line

Physical Methods



Exercise

Exercise may lower pain for people with many types of chronic pain, such as low back pain, knee osteoarthritis, hip osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, and neck pain^a



Acupuncture

Acupuncture may lower pain for people with low back pain, hip osteoarthritis, osteoarthritis, headache, shoulder pain, pelvic pain syndrome or prostatitis, sciatica, and myofascial pain.^a



Manual Therapy

Manual therapy may lower pain for people with chronic low back pain (spine manipulation and massage), neck pain (massage), and tension headaches (spine manipulation).^a

Psychological Methods



Mindfulness

Mindfulness may lower pain for people with low back pain and fibromyalgia.^a



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT may lower pain for people with low back pain, neck pain, knee osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia.^a



Yoga

Yoga may lower pain for people with low back pain and primary dysmenorrhea.^a

Preventive Methods



Splints and Braces

Splinting or bracing may lower pain for people with tennis elbow, carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoarthritis of the thumb or fingers, and osteoarthritis of the wrist.^a



Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight through diet and exercise may lower pain for people who are overweight and have low back pain or knee osteoarthritis.^a



Foot Orthotics

Foot orthotics may lower pain for people with low back pain, rheumatoid arthritis (with foot pain), and painful flexible flatfoot.^a

^a Note that there is uncertainty in these findings as the strength or quality of the evidence varied depending on the patient population, the duration of each intervention, and the length of follow-up for each intervention. More research is needed.

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This page is to be filled out by a health care provider.

Types of information to include are:

- name and contact information for a clinician who specializes in chronic pain
- specific recommendations (e.g., Exercise: walking 30 mins, 5 times per week)

View the clinician evidence summaries (cadth.ca/chronicpain) for useful tips and strategies when prescribing non-drug methods for managing pain.

Patient's name: _____

Methods for managing chronic pain can be grouped into drug and non-drug categories. Pain medications commonly work by mimicking the body's own pain relief system; many non-drug methods work by naturally producing those chemicals naturally. Non-drug therapies can be divided into three categories: psychological, physical, and preventive. These can be used on their own or in combination with medication. It is recommended that patients start by trying one of the many non-drug options for safely managing chronic pain. Everyone responds differently to these methods, so discuss your pain management goals with your health care provider to find something that works for you.

Research has found the following non-drug methods may lower chronic pain:

Physical methods:

- Exercise: _____
- Acupuncture: _____
- Manual therapies such as spinal manipulation and massage: _____
- Other: _____

Psychological methods:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy: _____
- Mindfulness: _____
- Yoga: _____
- Other: _____

Preventive methods:

- Splints and braces: _____
- Maintaining a healthy weight (through diet and exercise): _____
- Orthotics: _____
- Other: _____

Additional information:

- Accompanying patient handouts provided explaining the previously outlined methods to manage pain, or referral to cadth.ca/chronicpain to view these handouts online

Health care provider's signature: _____

Date: _____

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