Non-Invasive Treatment of Neck Pain

Manual therapies and exercise are more effective than alternative therapies for patients with neck pain.

Hurwitz EL, Carragee EJ, Van der Velde G, Carroll LJ, Nordin M, Guzman J, et al. Treatment of Neck Pain: Non-invasive Interventions. *J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2009 Feb;32(2S):S141-175.

THE OBJECTIVE of this best-evidence synthesis was to perform a critical appraisal and synthesize literature on non-invasive therapies for neck pain and associated disorders.

THIS STUDY conducted a Medline search of literature published between 1980 and 2006 on the use, effectiveness and safety of non-invasive neck pain interventions. The results were screened and rated for relevance, yielding 139 papers that were analyzed in detail.

RESULTS

- For "non-specific" neck pain, the evidence shows that manual therapy, supervised exercise and low-level laser therapy provide a therapeutic benefit and are more effective than alternative treatments. Acupuncture may also be helpful.
- For whiplash-associated disorders, there is evidence that mobilization, exercise and educational videos that include exercises and focus on restoring patients' ability to work and perform activities of daily life are more beneficial than conventional medical care or care involving passive modalities (TENS, ultrasound, diathermy), collars or general advice.
- For neck pain without radicular symptoms, therapies that aim at restoring function as soon as possible are more effective than types of therapy that do not have that focus.

CAVEATS

More research is needed on which non-invasive therapies are most effective for different types of neck pain in the short and long term.

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The research described in this column comes from credible, peer-reviewed journals. It is intended to serve as a resource for practitioners and patients to assist them in consideration of various health care options and does not replace clinical judgment.