

Alternative Therapies For Chronic Low Back Pain

Do you struggle with chronic low back pain? See which alternative therapies may help manage or relieve pain.

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A tense, stiff, achy back can literally cramp your style. Back pain is one of the most common causes for people to miss work, and most people have had back pain sometime in their lives.

Doctors usually recommend first trying medication and self-care to treat low back pain. Most back pain resolves with these conservative measures. Surgery is usually not needed.

Combined with conservative treatment, several alternative therapies may help relieve chronic low back pain.



Spinal manipulation involves applying pressure to a joint of the spine to improve alignment. This is usually done with the hands and is performed by chiropractors, physical therapists, osteopaths and some conventional medical doctors. Evidence shows that spinal manipulation can often give mild to moderate relief from low back pain. Relief may last a few months or longer.

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese practice. It's based on the theory that an energy force called qi (pronounced *chee*) flows through the body along certain pathways. When those pathways become blocked, it can result in pain or illness. Practitioners believe inserting fine needles at precise locations along these pathways can unblock the flow of qi. This is thought to relieve pain and restore health. Though it is not exactly clear how acupuncture works, there is some evidence that acupuncture is moderately effective at relieving chronic low back pain.

Yoga emphasizes stretching and flexibility. It involves holding certain postures while practicing breathing techniques and mental focus. Yoga is thought to help to release tension in the muscles, thus reducing back pain. For back pain, gentle yoga styles, such as hatha yoga, are advised. More vigorous styles may worsen symptoms.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches new ways to think and act in response to pain. The goal is to help you cope with pain better by changing any negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors that can block recovery. Learning skills, such as relaxation techniques, can help you ease muscle tension and divert attention from the pain. There is good evidence that cognitive-behavioral therapy is moderately helpful for chronic low back pain.

Massage therapy provides short-term pain relief by reducing inflammation and improving the flow of blood and oxygen to the muscles. Massage is considered moderately effective for improving chronic low back pain.

When you're looking into alternative treatments for back pain, always check with your doctor first. And, be sure to seek out qualified practitioners who have experience working with people who have back pain.

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