



# Effective Health Care

## Physical Therapy for Improving Symptoms

### Next Steps

The nominator is looking for evidence on which physical therapy modalities are better than others in the treatment of specific musculoskeletal symptoms/diagnoses. The concern is that opioids and/or surgery is often prescribed over other conservative treatment options.

The AHRQ EPC Program recently conducted and is now updating a systematic review on noninvasive nonpharmacologic interventions for the treatment of pain due to various etiologies. This addresses the nominators query and therefore no further activity will be undertaken on this topic.

### Summary

**Topic Name and Number:** #813, Physical Therapy for Improving Symptoms.

**Date:** 3/8/2019

**Key question(s) from the nomination:**

For patients with musculoskeletal issues, which types of physical therapy are better than others for improvements in symptoms and diagnoses? (e.g., functional manual therapy, counterstrain, etc.)

- Musculoskeletal pain, particularly related to joints and the back, is the most common single type of chronic pain.<sup>1</sup>
- Chronic pain is a significant public health challenge. It affects millions of adults in the United States, with a conservative annual cost estimated at \$560 billion to \$635 billion. Factors include low patient populations, high rates of uninsured, and physician shortages.<sup>1</sup>
- Concerns about the use of opioids for management of chronic pain spurred the publication of evidence-based guidelines on opioid use for chronic pain by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which included a recommendation on the preferred use of non-opioid treatment and alternative methods of managing chronic pain.<sup>2</sup>
- A vast array of pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatments are available for management of musculoskeletal pain. AHRQ is recently conducted and is now updating a systematic review addressing the effectiveness and comparative effectiveness of noninvasive and nonpharmacologic interventions (that includes physical modalities such as physical therapy).<sup>3,4</sup>

### References

1. Institute of Medicine. Relieving Pain in America: A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education, and Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2011. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK91497/>. Accessed on 3/8/2019
2. Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R. CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain--United States, 2016. JAMA. 2016 Apr 19;315(15):1624-45. doi: 10.1001/jama.2016.1464. PMID: 26977696

3. Skelly AC, Chou R, Dettori JR, et al. Noninvasive Nonpharmacological Treatment for Chronic Pain: A Systematic Review. Comparative Effectiveness Review No. 209. (Prepared by the Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center under Contract No. 290-2015-00009-I.) AHRQ Publication No 18-EHC013-EF. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. June 2018. <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/nonpharma-treatment-pain/res...> PMID: 30179389.
4. Systematic Review Update: Noninvasive Nonpharmacologic Treatments for Chronic Pain. Research Protocol. <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/noninvasive-nonpharm-pain-update/protocol#12>. Accessed on 3/8/2019