

Research has shown, unfortunately, that about 80% of us will experience back pain at some point in our lives. Odds are you (and I) have experienced it at some point. It can be pretty disabling, preventing us from doing the things we need or love to do – work effectively at our job, do house or yard work, participate in sports and athletic activities, exercise regularly, practice our favorite hobbies, play with our children, or even just sit or walk comfortably.

Many of us have probably tried various treatments in an attempt to overcome our back problems. These may have included:

- **Traditional Medical Care:** Rest, pain and/or anti-inflammatory medications, injections, and as a last resort (hopefully), surgery.

- **Physical Therapy:** Typically thought of as modalities such as heat/ice, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, as well as a structured exercise program. Can also include McKenzie exercises.

- **Chiropractic Care:** Typically includes spinal manipulation (“adjustments”), and possibly spinal decompression (the same thing as traction).

- **Exercise:** Stretching, strengthening, weight-training, yoga, pilates, etc.

- **Massage**

- **Acupuncture**

- **Advice from Friends or Family:** “Hey, this really worked for me. You should try it.”

The problem is, there are numerous causes of back pain, and a single approach to treating it simply does not work. This has been clearly demonstrated time and again in the medical research literature. You may have experienced this first-hand if you failed previous

treatment(s). All of the above-mentioned treatments can be beneficial, but not for everyone. Medications and injections treat pain and inflammation, which are symptoms, not the cause of a problem. Spinal manipulation can help, but alone has limited benefit. Massage and modalities (ice, heat, ultrasound, etc.) have been shown to have very little, short-term benefit. Massage and acupuncture have been shown to give short-term relief for those with chronic pain (pain lasting longer than 6 months). Exercise is definitely beneficial, but one exercise that helps someone, can actually make another person worse. Outcomes from surgery are not guaranteed, have potential risks, and limitations on activity are often present for a significant time afterwards. So, where does that leave us?

The latest research (the vast majority of which is being conducted by physical therapists) is showing that patients have a great chance of achieving a successful outcome if they are “sub-grouped”. What this means is that a physical therapist performs a thorough evaluation of the patient. Then, based on the patient’s response to the various tests during the evaluation, the treatment(s) that research has shown to be most effective for the problem(s) that patient has, are applied. Treatment, therefore, is truly individualized to each patient, giving them a very high chance (up to 92% if applied correctly) of overcoming their back pain and regaining function.

In the physical therapy community, we call applying this process “*evidence-based practice*” (EBP). ***EBP is using only treatments that have been shown in high-quality medical research to be most effective. At Hershey Orthopedic & Spine Rehabilitation, our therapists practice only***



HERSHEY ORTHOPEDIC & SPINE REHABILITATION

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evidence-based physical therapy. We do not waste your time using techniques that have been shown to be of limited or no benefit. As a result, our treatment programs are active and progressive, incorporating highly-skilled manual therapy techniques (including manipulation and mobilization), exercise programs specific to your needs, and education in habit and lifestyle changes, giving you the best chance of overcoming your current problem. We believe in helping you relieve your pain as soon as possible, in the shortest time possible, in the fewest visits possible. We believe in getting you back to doing what you need and love to do in the shortest, yet appropriate, timeframe, saving you time and

money. Our patients work with the same therapist throughout their course of treatment, receiving treatment and valuable instruction that, if followed, leads to long-term results. In short, we believe consulting our highly-skilled therapists gives you the best chance of beating and taking control of your back problems.

Can a problem recur, even after a successful course of treatment? Absolutely. Why that is will be covered in our next article, "How Do I Beat Back Pain (Part 2)". And why that is involves you and what you do more than it involves your physical therapist.