

PROVIDING A SAFE ALTERNATIVE TO OPIOIDS: RESEARCH ON PAIN MANAGEMENT



Pain is one of the most common reasons people seek health care. Research validates that early access to physical therapy can prevent acute pain from becoming chronic pain. The treatment of pain often requires an integrated, multidisciplinary approach due to the many variables that may contribute to a patient's perception of pain and response to treatment.

RESEARCH ON PREVENTION OF PAIN

- **Exercise and the Prevention of Low Back Pain: Ready for Implementation** [JAMA Intern Med. 2016 Feb;176(2):208-209]

Conclusion: The current evidence suggests that exercise alone or in combination with education is effective for preventing lower back pain.

RESEARCH ON THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL THERAPY IN MANAGING ACUTE PAIN

- **Physical Therapy as the First Point of Care to Treat Low Back Pain: An Instrumental Variables Approach to Estimate Impact on Opioid Prescription, Health Care Utilization, and Costs** [Health Serv Res. 2018 Dec;53(6):4629-4646]

Conclusion: Patients with low back pain who saw a physical therapist at the first point of care had lower utilization of high-cost medical services, lower opioid use, and lower health care costs compared with those who saw a physical therapist later in treatment, or never saw one at all.

- **Primary Care Referral of Patients With Low Back Pain to Physical Therapy: Impact on Future Health Care Utilization and Costs** [Spine (Phila Pa 1976). 2012 Dec 1;37(25):2114-2121]

Conclusion: Early physical therapy was associated with decreased use of advanced imaging, additional physician visits, surgery, injections, and opioid medications compared with delayed physical therapy.

- **The Effect of Timing of Physical Therapy for Acute Low Back Pain on Health Services Utilization: A Systematic Review** [Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2019 Jan 24]

Conclusion: Early physical therapy for acute low back pain may reduce health services utilization, cost, and opioid use, and improve health care efficiency.

RESEARCH ON THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL THERAPY IN MANAGING CHRONIC PAIN

- **Association of Early Physical Therapy With Long-term Opioid Use Among Opioid-Naive Patients With Musculoskeletal Pain** [JAMA Netw Open. 2018 Dec 7;1(8):e185909]

Conclusion: Early physical therapy was associated with significant reductions in long-term opioid use and lower amounts of opioids for patients with shoulder, neck, knee, and low back pain.

- **Associations Between Early Care Decisions and the Risk for Long-term Opioid Use for Patients With Low Back Pain With a New Physician Consultation and Initiation of Opioid Therapy** [Clin J Pain. 2018 Jun;34(6):552-558]

Conclusion: Early care such as benzodiazepine prescription and primary care visit was linked to increased risk of long-term opioid use, while an early physical therapy visit was associated with reduced risk of long-term opioid use.