

A photograph of a person's back being massaged. The person is lying on a yellow towel. A hand is visible on the left side of the frame, applying pressure to the back. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Treatment Options *for Your* **Back Pain**

In Search of the Magic Bullet

Treatment Options for Your Back Pain: In Search of the Magic Bullet

In the search for answers on effectively treating back pain - doctors and patients alike are always looking for the *right treatment* among the many options available for them to choose from.

These treatments may be in the form of physical therapy, medicines, medical procedures and even holistic treatments that are known to be effective in giving due remedy to an aching back.

The Right Diagnosis

The first thing patients should do when having back pains is to have it accurately diagnosed. A proper analysis on the cause of the back pain, will make it easier to finding the best treatment for your situation.

It is best to consult your family doctor and consider the available treatment options you could take. Your physician can best recommend the appropriate treatment, fit for your particular case. Ask proactively about the pros and cons with each treatment. And together, come up with what will possibly work best for you.

If you feel you need a second opinion, then by all means, do so. It is your right to ask for another professional opinion with regards to your case. Then only after you are convinced with the way to go, then you may proceed with the treatment of choice.

One should take note of the fact, that patients should believe on the efficacy of the treatment procedure undertaken, otherwise this would contribute possibly to depressions and unnecessary stress, which could make matters worse.

Treatments for Your Back

Below are some of the approaches applied for the treatment of one's back problems, with the hope of minimizing the pain at the very least, or better yet, provide for the cure sought upon.

a.) *Physical therapy* – With this type of treatment, you will have to get the services of a licensed physical therapist who will be able to guide you on how to care of your back, and provide for your rehabilitation and recovery.

Your therapist will identify the dysfunction that is currently causing your back pain and will come up with treatment regimen that will ease the pain on your back and give it more flexibility.

- **Massage** – This promotes better blood circulation on the back area and prevents back stiffness, thereby providing pain relief.
- **Cold and heat** – Cold compress are to be applied several times a day as the pain occurs. After a couple of days, the use of heat treatments – either thru a hot bath or thru heating pad – may provide comfort and a soothing effect.

Take note though not to apply cold compress or heat pads for more than 20 minutes; and special attention should be given to those with impaired sensations, otherwise you may be in for frostbites and burns.

- **Electrical Stimulation** – This is also called **TENS** (*transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation*). This involves the use of a small device that will deliver a safe amount of electrical current on your back that treats your pain.
- **Therapeutic Ultrasound** – This is used to relax your back muscles, and ideal before going into the formal exercise routine. This is a higher frequency type of ultrasound, and will be able to provide a deep-heating relief.
- **Traction** – This uses weights to put tension on a dislocated bone or joint to bring it back to the proper alignment. Also, this is utilized to stretch a group of muscles to reduce muscle spasms. This has been observed as well to provide relief for patients with back problems.

b.) Medication - This is generally done to be able to provide temporary relief from the back pain the patient is subjected to. It will make the pain more bearable, but one should take note that this will in no way cure your back pains from the source.

- **Over-the-counter drugs** like pain relievers and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (*NSAIDs*) are often used to remedy one's back pain. However, be wary on the use of such drugs, and be conscious on the possible side effects as ulcers and stomach pains that may result with such use, especially on longer periods. Always consult your doctor on the right medication for your case.

Physicians may also prescribe other medications as: muscle relaxants, cortisone injections, nerve blocks, and anti-inflammatory medicines. Narcotics as codeine, may also be prescribed, but only if your situation

really requires it. Long-term use of narcotics is not recommended, as these are dangerous and addictive.

c.) **Epidural Injection** – This has been shown to be effective in treating lower back problems. This anti-inflammatory medication is performed around the small joints in the spine, nerve root and the spinal canal.

The injection consists of a combination of steroids and anesthetics. This will help lessen the pain, and is usually employed as a last attempt to postpone having to go to surgery.

d.) **Biofeedback Therapy** – This makes use of an electronic machine that will help individuals become more aware of how their body responds to stress and pain. It measures bodily functions as breathing, muscle tension, and heart rate. This approach teaches one how to relax and alter these functions. It also teaches one to deal with pain.

With biofeedback training, you can control your body's vital functions. This procedure works by placing electrodes with wires attached to it, on the patient's skin. The patient is monitored by his skin temperature, muscle tension, heart rate, etc, while relaxation and meditative techniques are employed to get the desired response of one's vital function. One will be able to relax his muscle, or lower his heart rate, or whatever function one is consciously controlling

e.) **Chiropractic Adjustment** – This involves adjusting the joints and bones in the spine to get the proper alignment - using careful twisting, pulling, and pushing techniques.

This is a manual treatment process wherein a controlled and sudden force is applied to the joints and other back structures - to improve one's mobility on the area treated.

f.) ***Holistic medicine and alternative approaches*** – This may involve the use of acupuncture, reflexology, bio-magnets, or yoga to give the individual temporary relief of the pain on his back.

Descriptions on some of these approaches are shown below.

- **Acupuncture** – This originated from China and considered to be one of the oldest medical procedures around. Acupuncture makes use of needles inserted on specific points of the body in order to restore balance of one's physical, and spiritual aspects.

Many have tried this and have considered their experience as a relaxing one with pleasant and warm sensations felt with the treatment. The immune system is also known to be stimulated with such procedure, together with claimed benefits of increased blood circulation and production of body hormones that promote one's well being.

- **Yoga** – This makes use of specific physical postures and poses that not only improves one's physical health, but more so on one's mental and spiritual well-being.

The practice of yoga involves stretching and balance, thereby promoting strength and flexibility of one's body. Poses are done, either slowly or in quick succession depending upon what one is aiming to get from the session.

Viniyoga is the gentle form of yoga. This helps relieve stress & muscle tension, and could very well assist in alleviating the pain on one's back.

g.) Surgery – Usually the last resort, after exhausting all other alternatives to control the chronic pain experienced by a patient.

Some of these surgical procedures are:

- *Spinal fusion* – This requires placing a bone graft between 2 or more vertebrae and these will eventually grow together.
- *Discectomy* – This is a surgical removal of a herniated disk to relieve pressure on a nerve root.
- *Laminectomy* – This requires the removing of the lamina to allow more room for the nerves, and subsequently reducing irritation of these nerves.

While there are success stories on the use of surgery for specific types of back problems, not all surgeries turn out the same way – with the same success as the others. And just because one benefited from a surgical procedure, would not necessarily mean you also will.

Again, surgery should be the last option, and performed only when there is a clear and identifiable condition that warrants such procedure. If one should decide to have surgery, one should also have realistic expectations about it.

Completing the formula: Exercise

This is commonly used for the prevention of back pains; at the same time, this is also used in the treatment of back pains as part of a *comprehensive rehabilitation program*.

One may start out with light exercises as walking. Exercising at least 20 minutes a day, for at least 3 times a week, will already do your body good. Then one can gradually put more intensity to the exercises, or can increase the frequency in order to get in better condition.

It is advisable to make exercise a habit. It is beneficial for your spine as well as your general health. Indeed having a healthy back, will make one less prone to these disturbing back pains.

The Right Treatment - Your Magic Bullet

The magic bullet to eliminate the pain on your back may be elusive, but having it on your hands is not impossible.

In the course of your quest towards a pain-free back, your personal doctor might refer you to other health-care professionals like a physical therapist, a massage therapist, an exercise physiologist, a chiropractor, osteopath, acupuncturist, and the like – all having their own specialty, techniques and theories towards the best treatment for your back.

The journey will not be that easy, and one has to take it upon himself, to process this information with regards to the alternative options, so that one can play an active role in his back treatment. A discussion with your doctor will then be in order, so that one will be able to arrive at a decision on the right treatment ideal for the case at hand.

One should keep in mind that the idea is to employ a *comprehensive & scientific approach*. Comprehensive - in the sense that all the necessary details are covered from getting the right diagnosis, the proper treatments, the appropriate preventive measures, and the use of the correct approach. And scientific - in the

sense that one starts with the most conservative treatments, and then proceeding to higher forms of treatment as may be necessary.

Provision for Prevention

It is always a good idea, that after a successful treatment is made, that appropriate preventive measures should be put into place. One cannot just take his previous back injury lightly, and believe that he is fully healed and will not have the same problems in the future.

Preventive measures for back safety will not only help in protecting for a repeat injury, these will also prevent you from getting new back problems that may come about from one's negligence in heeding the precautionary measures to avoid back injuries.

Proper care of your back will have to be in order, and one must take the appropriate measures to protect his back and keep it in good condition. Lifestyle changes will have to be done. One has to eat right, exercise regularly and have sufficient rest. These will put your body in the best condition – *with the hope that back treatments would no longer be necessary in the future* – with the healthy back you have with you.

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