

Chapter 10

Other methods



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SUMMARY OF SYSTEMS, METHODS AND MODALITIES USED IN THE MANUAL TREATMENT OF BACK PAIN

There is an inevitable overlap in this attempt to summarize and define different, yet similar, approaches to the treatment and rehabilitation of back pain. Many of the systems have borrowed extensively from each other, and with 'evidence based' medicine now so widespread, it is becoming clear that the traditional differences between systems such as osteopathy and chiropractic, as examples, is narrowing. At the same time, an eclectic selection of methods and modalities is entering physical therapy and physiatry, to the extent that in some settings it is no longer possible to distinguish, from what is being done therapeutically, to which profession a practitioner belongs. This brief summary is not comprehensive, but hopefully offers an overview of what is available. Referral to other therapists and practitioners is strongly advised whenever areas of the patient's dysfunctional pattern seem to be outside your area of competence.

Massage therapy can be usefully combined with almost all of the methods and systems listed in Tables 10.1 and 10.2.

Table 10.1 Systems and methods

| System | Abbreviated description |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Osteopathy | In the USA, osteopathy is a primary care system that couples mainstream medical care with manipulation aimed at enhancing biomechanical, neurological, circulatory and other functions of the body. In the rest of the world, osteopathy is largely regulated, but has a more limited musculoskeletal focus with DOs focusing on what they term 'somatic dysfunction'. Many of the soft tissue methods discussed in this text (MET, PRT for example) evolved out of osteopathic methodology. |
| Chiropractic | Chiropractic uses manipulative and rehabilitation methods to normalize restricted joint function (subluxations) using, as a main tool, high velocity thrust adjustments. Increasingly DCs are using other, less invasive approaches. |
| Physical therapy | PTs have traditionally been seen as a profession supplementary to medicine, but are increasingly becoming first line practitioners, focusing largely on rehabilitation (post-surgery, post-trauma, etc.). PTs now use many of the methods developed by DCs and DOs; who in turn are increasingly using the rehabilitation methods developed in physical therapy. |
| Exercise rehabilitation | A wide range of variably trained practitioners and therapists use exercises in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation contexts; aimed at specific joints or general posture, for example. The best known methods, such as the Alexander Technique, Athletic training, Pilates and Feldenkrais, have a large educational component, with some focusing on core stability and others on enhanced use of the body. |
| Massage | Massage therapy is gradually dividing into broad categories which focus on either 'wellness/relaxation', or therapeutic intervention (often in athletic contexts), with many LMTs also incorporating rehabilitation exercise methods. Standards vary worldwide from excellent to poor, with major efforts underway to raise training standards, as research validates the importance of this traditional approach to health and healing. A number of ethnic variations such as Ayurvedic and Thai massage are becoming increasingly researched and used. |
| Prolotherapy | An increasingly commonly used approach aimed at creating repetitive irritation of connective tissue (using various injected substances) to help normalize unstable joints such as sacroiliac. |
| TCM (in addition to acupuncture) | Tuina methods used in TCM have many of the characteristics of osteopathy and chiropractic as well as a range of unique soft tissue methods. |
| Soft tissue manipulation | See Table 10.2. |
| Physiatry | A branch of medicine that utilizes an eclectic selection of manipulation and other methods (e.g. prolotherapy) in treatment of musculoskeletal dysfunction. |
| Movement therapy | Yoga, Tai chi, Chi Gung, Trager work, Aston patterning, etc. are examples of this large area of care which enjoys increasing respect as the methods are validated by research, in both therapeutic and rehabilitation settings. |

MET, muscle energy technique; PRT, positional release technique; PTs, physical therapists; DOs, osteopaths; DCs, chiropractors; LMTs, licensed massage therapists; TCM, traditional Chinese Medicine.

Table 10.2 Soft tissue manipulation methods

| Technique | Description |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Articulation | Repetitive passive movements employing leverage through variable ranges of the arc. |
| Effleurage | Superficial drainage technique derived from massage therapy. |
| Inhibition/ischemic compression | Describes an objective rather than a method; consists of pressure applied for lengthy periods, slowly applied and slowly released, using thumb contact as a rule. |
| Kneading | Deep or superficial rhythmical pressure, usually applied by thenar or hypothenar eminence. |
| Positional release techniques (PRT) | Approaches that, instead of acting directly on restricted or shortened structures, aim to position them in a state of 'ease' by moving away from restriction barriers, allowing a spontaneous normalization to occur, involving neural (muscle spindle) resetting and circulatory enhancement. These methods include what is known as strain/counterstrain, as well as much craniosacral work. |
| Rhythmic traction | Repetitive attempts to separate articulations in order to stretch interarticular and periarticular structures. |
| Springing | Repetitive, usually slowly applied, pressure of a gradual nature, often used diagnostically. |
| Stretching | Short and long amplitude attempts at separation of muscular attachments, and stretch of ligaments, fascia, and membranes. |
| Vibration | Rapid oscillatory pressure or movement. |
| Muscle energy techniques (MET) | Use of variations on the theme of isometric and isotonic contractions to initiate increased tolerance to stretching of shortened muscle, and/or increased tone (facilitation) of inhibited muscles. |
| Neuromuscular techniques (NMT) | Integrated combinations of the methods listed above, together with unique assessment and treatment methods that 'meet and match' tissue tension – based originally on Ayurvedic massage. |