

# Acute Low Back Pain and Spinal Manipulation

## The Evidence

Just a few decades ago the chiropractic profession practiced in a relative absence of good scientific data concerning its main therapeutic tool, spinal manipulation. The success of this profession and of this treatment with patient care was empirically based. The evidence basis of spinal manipulation, however, has changed dramatically in recent years with a large number of well done clinical trials filling the information void.

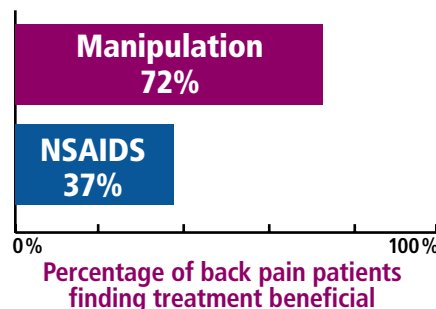
Analysis of the volume of research available on the topic of spinal manipulation and low back pain can be surprising to many health care providers who do not practice this specialty. The volume of research on spinal manipulation for acute low back pain is greater than for any other single treatment used for this condition. Currently, there are approximately 50 clinical trials of which about 35 are controlled randomized trials examining spinal manipulation for low back pain. This is approximately 4 to 5 times the trials that have examined the validity of NSAIDs for this patient population.

The majority of the clinical trials on spinal manipulation for acute low back pain have found this treatment to be beneficial, outperform-

ing the comparative or control treatments which have included virtually all other commonly used therapies. In a review of the randomized, placebo controlled clinical trials van Tulder et al<sup>1</sup> found that there were 18 such trials of manipulation in acute back pain patients with 13 or 72% finding this treatment beneficial. For comparison another common treatment, NSAIDs, had been examined in 19 such trials with only 7 or 37% finding the treatment beneficial.



*(Re: spinal manipulation)  
"No other back pain treatment has been subjected to such examination...when all 54 trials are considered together, the evidence in favor of manipulation is overwhelming."*



At the 15th Annual Spinal Disorders Conference, Scott Haldeman, DC, MD, PhD, spoke of the status of spinal manipulation for acute low back pain.<sup>2</sup> He commented that "No other back pain treatment (spinal manipulation) has been subjected to such examination .....when all 54 trials are considered together, the evidence in favor of manipulation is overwhelming." The effectiveness of spinal manipulation is not

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# Acute Low Back Pain and Spinal Manipulation

*The Evidence*

*[continued from other side]*

comparatively limited to only a few other treatments. Haldeman further commented that manipulation has consistently outperformed any other therapy it has been compared to including placebo, ultrasound, traction, exercise, bedrest and medications and in most outcome measures such as range of motion, cost-effectiveness, lost time from work, patient satisfaction and pain relief.

It is this broad base of evidence that led the federal AHCPR to recommend spinal manipulation as only one of three first choice treatments in their Clinical Practice Guideline *Acute Low Back Problems In Adults*. Spinal manipulation, primarily based on research emphasis by the chiropractic profession, has been transformed over the past 10-15 years from an empirically supported treatment to one of the most scientifically validated for the perplexing problem of acute low back pain.

## REFERENCES

- 1) van Tulder MW, Koes BW, Bouter LM. CONSERVATIVE TREATMENT OF ACUTE AND CHRONIC NONSPECIFIC LOW BACK PAIN: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS OF THE MOST COMMON INTERVENTIONS. *Spine*, 1997;22:2128-2156.
- 2) FROM QUACKERY TO SCIENTIFIC LEGITIMIZATION: MANIPULATION'S TWENTY-YEAR MARCH TO RESPECTABILITY. *The Backletter*, 1994;9:125.

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# Acute Low Back Pain and Spinal Manipulation

*The Evidence*

*summary*

- The evidence basis of spinal manipulation has changed dramatically in recent years with a large number of well done clinical trials filling the information void.
- The majority of the clinical trials on spinal manipulation for acute low back pain have found this treatment to be beneficial, outperforming the comparative or control treatments which have included virtually all other commonly used therapies.
- ...manipulation has consistently outperformed any other therapy it has been compared to including placebo, ultrasound, traction, exercise, bedrest and medications and in most outcome measures such as range of motion, cost-effectiveness, lost time from work, patient satisfaction and pain relief.