



"I utilize a strong integration of many traditional physical therapy approaches with innovative techniques in order to achieve the best possible results. I accomplish this through my specialization in manual therapy, movement/postural analysis and exercise with yoga. I also teach breath control, progressive muscle relaxation and stress reduction techniques to help patients begin to understand and utilize the mind-body connection. I work to empower patients with education, motivation, exercise and a strong sense of how their body 'works'. I believe this type of care is of much higher quality and is unlike any other that a patient could receive in this region."

Kotyk holds a Master's degree in Physical Therapy from the School of Physical Therapy at Slippery Rock University and is a member of the American Physical Therapy Association and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists.

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**Todd J. Kotyk, MPT**  
*Owner/Director*

153 East Pike Street  
Canonsburg, PA 15317  
**724-745-5646**

## HOW TO GUIDE

# How To Prevent And Manage Pain: The Benefits of Physical Therapy

**C**hronic pain of any kind can affect your quality of life—regardless of age or overall health. The good news is that physical therapy and other effective treatments for pain are available.

The information that follows will help to explain how physical therapy is often the best choice to help your pain, and how it can be used alone or in cooperation with other treatments to achieve the best results.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are a common cause of pain, and are the result of injury, overuse or disease. MSDs can affect the body's muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments and nerves, causing familiar problems such as back and neck pain, joint pain, and soft tissue pain.

Todd Kotyk, Owner and Director of Appropriate Physical Therapy Services, located on East Pike Street in Canonsburg, states: "Physical therapy will typically help any aches and pains resulting from an MSD. It doesn't matter if the pain is the result of a trauma, slip-and-fall, or a chronic injury from overuse." Kotyk adds, "The fact is that good posture and body mechanics can alleviate your pain, keep it from coming back and lower the risk of developing new problems. I try to understand what's causing your pain and address it with the best means. I pick whatever is appropriate for the person to treat the cause of their pain - not just the symptoms."

The following are some options that come to mind when people think about treatment for MSDs and chronic pain. All of these can be beneficial, but physical therapy can offer an alternative to these or complement them to achieve the best results.

## Diagnostic Testing

X-rays, MRIs, CT scans, etc. are famil-

iar procedures used to diagnose and direct the treatment of MSD pain. However, these procedures may be difficult to schedule and expensive. In many cases, an evaluation by an experienced physical therapist is a better first option. The physical therapist can design and guide you through an exercise program targeted to reduce your pain and possibly eliminate the need for further procedures.

## Medications

Prescription drugs and medications are often used as treatments for MSD pain, but their use is now being examined more closely. The American Heart Association recommends doctors change their approach to prescribing pain relievers for patients with or at risk of heart disease. In a scientific statement published Feb. 27, 2007 in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, the heart specialists instead prescribe physical therapy first.

"We believe that some physicians have been prescribing the new COX-2 inhibitors as the first line of treatment. We are turning that around and saying that, for chronic pain in patients with known heart disease or who are at risk for heart disease, these drugs should be the last line of treatment," said Elliott M. Antman, M.D., FAHA, lead author of the American Heart Association scientific statement and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital.

"We advise physicians to start with non-pharmacologic treatments such as physical therapy and exercise, weight loss to reduce stress on joints, and heat or cold therapy. If the non-pharmacologic approach does not provide enough pain relief or control of symptoms, we recommend a stepped-care approach when it comes to prescribing drugs."

"This recommendation comes as no surprise to physical therapists," said Dr. Timothy Flynn from Regis University, Denver, and President of the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT). "Research has repeatedly shown the value of early physical therapy for patients with musculoskeletal conditions. We are glad to see that the AHA's recommendations of physical therapy as a safe and effective alternative to drugs are consistent with

these findings. It only makes sense to see your physical therapist before trying drugs and surgery."

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) expresses a similar view: "Many people are looking for alternatives to the sole use of medication to deal with painful conditions," said APTA President Ben F. Massey, Jr., PT, MA. "Pain medication may help you get through periods of severe pain, but it won't always help you eliminate the underlying cause of some kinds of pain. For many individuals, it is the underlying causes like poor posture and alignment, weak and/or inflexible muscles, or tight joint structures that actually exacerbate the painful condition," Massey explained. "A physical therapist will perform a complete musculoskeletal examination and design an individualized treatment program to reduce pain and improve function."

Masey continued: "There are many types of pain and inflammation that can be reduced by physical therapist intervention. For example, chronic pain in the back, shoulder, or knee or pain associated with certain degenerative diseases such as osteoarthritis, can be reduced with the appropriate combination of medication and exercise. "The physical therapist, in collaboration with the patient and the patient's physician, can help the patient manage his or her health over the long term."

A February 2008 report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that from 1997 to 2005, pharmaceutical expenditures for the management of low back pain increased by 171% while the rate of good outcomes fell. "All the imaging we do, all the drug treatments, all the injections, all the operations have some benefit for some patients," said Richard A. Deyo, a physician at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland and a coauthor of the report. "But I think in each of those situations we've begun using those tests or treatments more widely than science would really support."

## Surgery

Surgery is sometimes necessary, but it

any surgery has risks. There are no guarantees that surgery will be successful, so it should be looked at as the last option in treating a musculoskeletal condition. The AAOMPT suggests considering alternatives to lumbar surgery as proposed by the Association of Ethical Spine Surgeons, who understand that lumbar surgery rates in the U.S. are overutilized. The number one alternative to lumbar surgery, according to the surgeons themselves, is to first visit a physical therapist.

"That is the mantra of AAOMPT", noted Dr. Flynn, "Go see your physical therapist first. We can alleviate the pain in your back, and show you how to prevent it from reoccurring." A good physical therapist will also recognize when there are limitations to the effectiveness of their services and refer those patients back to their referring doctor or suggest seeing other specialists including surgeons.

When it comes to chronic back pain management patients should know that "more is less and less is more." The American Pain Society recently unveiled the second part of a practice guideline for the management of low back pain. Part one of the guidelines, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in October 2007, focused on non-surgical interventions for low back pain. Part two of the guidelines took a look at the research supporting invasive procedures for the treatment of chronic low back pain. The scientific review concluded that most invasive interventions demonstrated no evidence of effectiveness. Furthermore, surgical procedures for chronic low back pain demonstrated only small improvement in pain and disability but were accompanied by considerable risk.

In summary, Todd Kotyk, Owner and Director of Appropriate Physical Therapy Services in Canonsburg, states, "My treatment approach as a physical therapist can work with or in place of other methods discussed in this article. My message is that whenever you have pain or any other musculoskeletal problem, think physical therapy first. And, as always, if you have questions, please feel free to contact me or speak to your physician about the positive benefits of physical therapy in managing your health." ●