

PRESS RELEASE

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What Spells Relief for Low Back Pain Patients?

If you've ever suffered from a bout of low back pain, then you know that finding relief is often any patient's main goal. And with low back pain sending 2.5 million Americans to hospital emergency rooms every year, that's a lot of patients seeking treatment options to relieve the pain.

Medications—or combinations of medications—are often the standard of care for low back pain, particularly in the emergency department setting. But according to recent research, including an [Annals of Emergency Medicine study](#), certain commonly prescribed combinations of drugs proved no more effective in alleviating pain than non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs alone or no medications at all. Besides proving relatively ineffective in managing back pain, some commonly prescribed medications come with a long list of side effects from drowsiness to nausea for many patients.

What about surgery? As it turns out, researchers have found that some surgical procedures for back pain are no more effective than sham procedures (used as a scientific control in clinical studies, these faked surgical procedures omit the step thought to be therapeutically necessary). In fact, a study that published in the journal [Pain Medicine](#) revealed comparable long-term outcomes regardless of whether patients were assigned to the procedure or sham procedure cohort.

Luckily, patients are beginning to see the benefits of pursuing safe alternatives to medications and surgery. A physical therapy regimen for low back pain is designed to reduce soft tissue pain, improve function and build muscle strength.

Although studies show that the long-term outcomes of surgery and physical therapy are similar for the low back pain patient population, the short-term risks differ. Surgical procedures for low back pain are invasive and like any surgery, come with the risk of infection, nerve damage and blood clots. However, similar outcomes can be achieved with an active, standardized physical therapy regimen without the high price tag and prospect of complications. PTs design programs for low back pain that involve general conditioning, lower extremity strengthening exercises and postural education.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for back pain so patients should work with rehab professionals, doctors and other healthcare practitioners to find the best course of treatment for them.

About The Private Practice Section of the American Physical Therapy Association

Founded in 1956, the Private Practice Section of the American Physical Therapy Association champions the success of physical therapist-owned businesses. Our members are leaders and innovators in the health care system. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) represents more than 85,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants and students of physical therapy nationwide. For more information, please visit www.ppsapta.org.