

Non-Pharmacological Treatments for Pain: Provider Information

- Opioids are not the first-line or routine therapy for chronic pain.
- Non-pharmacologic therapy and non-opioid pharmacologic therapy are preferred for chronic pain.
- If opioids are used, they should be combined with non-pharmacologic therapy and non-opioid pharmacologic therapy, as appropriate.

Effective approaches to chronic pain should:

- Identify and address co-existing mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD).
- Focus on functional goals and improvement, engaging patients actively in their pain management.
- Use disease-specific treatments when available (e.g., triptans for migraines, gabapentin/pregabalin/duloxetine for neuropathic pain).
- Use first-line medication options preferentially.
- Use multimodal approaches, including interdisciplinary rehabilitation for patients who have failed standard treatments, have severe functional deficits, or psychosocial risk factors.

Non-Pharmacological Treatments	Types of Pain Treated	Description
Yoga ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-back pain and neck pain • Osteoarthritis • Arthritis • Fibromyalgia • Carpal tunnel syndrome • Headaches 	A mind-body and exercise practice that combines breath control, meditation, and movements to stretch and strengthen muscles.
Cognitive-behavioral Therapy ^{2, 3, 4}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migraines • Fibromyalgia • Chronic low-back pain • Pain in children and adolescents with chronic headaches or other types of chronic pain 	Trains patients in behavioral techniques, helps patients modify situational factors and cognitive processes that exacerbate pain, has small positive effects on disability and catastrophic thinking.
Massage ^{5, 6, 7}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic low-back pain • Chronic neck pain • Pain due to osteoarthritis of the knee • Fibromyalgia • Headaches • Post-operative pain 	The rubbing and kneading of muscles and joints of the body with the hands, especially to relieve tension or pain.
Relaxation Techniques ^{8, 9}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General pain • Chronic headaches • Chronic pain in children and adolescents 	Include a number of practices (e.g., progressive relaxation, guided imagery, biofeedback, self-hypnosis and deep breathing exercises) to produce the body's natural relaxation response, characterized by slower breathing, lower blood pressure and feeling of increased well-being.
Acupuncture ^{10, 11}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of pain that are often chronic: low-back pain, neck pain, osteoarthritis/knee pain • Tension headaches • Migraines • Post-surgical pain 	A system of integrative medicine that involves pricking the skin or tissues with needles, used to alleviate pain and to treat various physical, mental, and emotional conditions.
Mindfulness-based stress reduction ^{12, 13, 14}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic low-back pain 	An eight-week evidence-based program that offers secular, intensive mindfulness training to assist people with stress, anxiety, depression and pain.
Tai Chi and Qi Gong ^{15, 16, 17}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back pain and pain from knee osteoarthritis • May ease fibromyalgia pain • May reduce chronic neck pain, but study results are mixed 	Mind and body practices. They involve certain postures and gentle movements with mental focus, breathing, and relaxation.

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References

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