

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Spinal Manual Therapy for Non-Spinal Musculoskeletal Disorders

Utilization Management Policy # 490

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What is spinal manual therapy and what is known about it so far?

Spinal manual therapy is a hands-on method of manipulating or mobilizing the joints and tissues of the neck, mid and lower back. Manual therapy is often used by chiropractors and physical therapists.

The use of spinal manual therapy has been viewed as a possible treatment of non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders involving the head/face, arms and legs.

How was spinal manual therapy for non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders evaluated?

A work group of clinicians was assigned to review the available research. The internet was searched for relevant articles. The work group independently examined the selected research studies. A broadly accepted rating scale was used. Possible ratings were proven benefit, potential but unproven benefit, and no proven benefit.

Before it was approved, the policy was presented to a series of committees that included independent health care practitioners.

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What did the work group find?

There is only limited research about the effectiveness of spinal manual therapy for non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders. The findings showed some promising results. The overall research quality was rated as *low*. Better quality studies are needed.

It was not possible to decide that spinal manual therapy for non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders provided more benefit or less risk, when compared to generally accepted and safe treatments including traditional rehabilitation procedures.

What were the limitations of the information?

Most studies did not evaluate if the results of spinal manual therapy lasted for more than immediately after treatment. Most studies looked at only a small number of individuals, making difficult to apply the findings to most people. Few studies described the clinical benefit of treatment.

The use of spinal manual therapy has not been studied for many non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders.

What are the conclusions?

Spinal manual therapy for the treatment of non-spinal musculoskeletal disorders is viewed as *unproven and not medically necessary*. Further research is needed before its use can be considered an established treatment option.