Back Pain and Spinal Manipulation: A Practical Guide

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Spinal Manipulation (High-Velocity Low-Amplitude Thrust) The most frequently used chiropractic technique, spinal manipulation, is the traditional high-velocity low-amplitude (HVLA) thrust. The manipulation often results in an audible “pop,” as chiropractors use their hands to apply a controlled sudden force to a joint while the body is positioned in a specific way. Chiropractors are not the only health care providers who utilize spinal manipulation for back pain treatment. Many osteopathic physicians will provide a variety of types of spinal adjustments, such as the spinal manipulation and mobilization described in this article. Occasionally, other types of health care professionals, such as physical therapists or physiatrists, will be trained in providing spinal manipulation as well. Most spinal manipulations are done by chiropractors (chiropractic treatment often involves spinal manipulation), although other licensed professionals including osteopathic physicians and physical therapists also do spinal manipulations. Many noninvasive treatments are available for low-back pain, and these include drugs and nondrug options. In its 2017 clinical guidelines, the American College of Physicians (ACP) suggests that spinal manipulation is one of a number of therapeutic options that may help people with acute or chronic low-back pain (although the ACP says the quality of the evidence is low). Spinal manipulation was better than placebo for immediate, short-term relief from acute or subacute low-back and neck pain, a 2010 research review concluded. Spinal manipulation, adjustment, and popping of the spinal joints and the subluxation theory of disease, back pain and neck pain. Paul Ingraham, updated Aug 9, 2019.

SHOW SUMMARY This article covers these topics thoroughly - it is one the most detailed online guides that I know of. I particularly discuss the pros and cons of SMT as it relates to the treatment of neck pain, back pain, headaches, and muscle pain. The scientific bottom line: meh. Historically, spinal manipulative therapy for acute low back pain has been regarded as the best example of evidence-based care routinely offered by the chiropractic profession. Even many fierce critics of chiropractic have supported this claim (or at least left it alone while focusing on more glaring issues).