
Abstract

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Manual therapy and exercise therapy in patients with chronic low back pain: a randomized, controlled trial with 1-year follow-up.

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Abstract

STUDY DESIGN: A multicenter, randomized, controlled trial with 1-year follow-up.

OBJECTIVES: To compare the effect of manual therapy to exercise therapy in sick-listed patients with chronic low back pain (>8 wks).

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND DATA: The effect of exercise therapy and manual therapy on chronic low back pain with respect to pain, function, and sick leave have been investigated in a number of studies. The results are, however, conflicting.

METHODS: Patients with chronic low back pain or radicular pain sick-listed for more than 8 weeks and less than 6 months were included. A total of 49 patients were randomized to either manual therapy (n = 27) or to exercise therapy (n = 22). Sixteen treatments were given over the course of 2 months. Pain intensity, functional disability (Oswestry disability index), general health (Dartmouth COOP function charts), and return to work were recorded before, immediately after, at 4 weeks, 6 months, and 12 months after the treatment period. Spinal range of motion (Schober test) was measured before and immediately after the treatment period only.

RESULTS: Although significant improvements were observed in both groups, the manual therapy group showed significantly larger improvements than the exercise therapy group on all outcome variables throughout the entire experimental period. Immediately after the 2-month treatment period, 67% in the manual therapy and 27% in the exercise therapy group had returned to work ($P < 0.01$), a relative difference that was maintained throughout the follow-up period.

CONCLUSIONS: Improvements were found in both intervention groups, but manual therapy showed significantly greater improvement than exercise therapy in patients with chronic low back pain. The effects were reflected on all outcome measures, both on short and long-term follow-up.

Comment in

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