Alternative Treatment for Back Pain

If you suffer from back, neck, or shoulder pain, there are several alternative therapies that may ease your discomfort and help you have a speedy return to your daily activities. What works for one person may not work for another, so it's a good idea to explore a variety of options to see which treatment best suits your needs.

Here is a guide to some of the most popular alternative therapies for pain relief.

- **Acupuncture**, an important element in traditional Chinese medicine, has been practiced in China and other Asian countries for thousands of years. Today it is one of the most popular forms of alternative therapies available. During a session, the acupuncturist inserts very thin sterilized needles into specific points on your body. According to traditional Chinese medicine, the body has more than 2,000 of these points, and they are connected by pathways—called meridians—that create a flow of energy called Qi (pronounced chee). Acupuncture stimulates these points, correcting the imbalance of Qi and improving energy flow. Experts believe that the positive results of acupuncture may be created through stimulating the central nervous system, allowing chemicals to be released that either soften the experience of pain or promote a sense of well-being.

- **Physical therapy (also known as physiotherapy)** can be helpful if you suffer from back, neck, or shoulder pain. The therapist may use machines, traction, stretching exercises, and other hands-on techniques to move your body around in a specific way. One of the most useful types of physical therapy for chronic back pain is "hands-on soft tissue mobilization," in which the therapist moves the soft tissues in your back. Physical therapists can also help correct your posture and give you exercises to do at home. Be sure to commit to doing your homework—it won't do you much good to get physical therapy twice a week and then just sit in your usual bad posture and avoid your exercises.

- **Chiropractic services** are another option to help with your back pain, shoulder pain, or neck pain. Chiropractors use their hands as well as other tools to manipulate the joints of the body to help alleviate discomfort, and they can be especially effective at treating acute back pain. Sometimes they also use ultrasound and heat therapy to break the cycles of muscle spasms and trigger points that cause chronic irritation. Between sessions, you may want to invest in a heat wrap, a heating pad, or a heat pack for use at home. And don’t be afraid to ask questions during your visits. Chiropractors can be excellent educators about back health, teaching you exercises and techniques that can prevent back pain from getting worse or from recurring once it has eased.

- **Osteopathy** can also be a useful treatment for back pain. Osteopaths treat the whole body (as opposed to specific symptoms) and focus on the musculoskeletal system as one of the key elements to overall health and well-being. Osteopaths believe that structural problems in the spinal column can affect the nerves that spread out to the various organs, and that this can lead to problems throughout the body. They use gentle manipulation to restore normal function to the body.

- **Therapeutic massage** can relieve certain types of back, neck, and shoulder pain. Deep tissue massage is especially helpful if your pain is caused by tense or overworked muscles, because massage eliminates the buildup of lactic acid or waste products in the muscles, and this helps you heal faster. To ensure that your massage therapy treatments are provided by individuals who have been properly trained, look for a registered massage therapist (RMT) who is a member in good standing of the provincial chapter of the Professional Association for Massage Therapists.

- **Mind-body therapies** include guided imagery, meditation, hypnosis, biofeedback, relaxation therapy, music therapy, talk therapy, and other forms of therapy. These treatments focus on the fact that there is a mind-body connection, meaning that mental, emotional, social, and behavioural factors can affect our physical health. As a result, relaxing the mind can help with any discomfort in the body.

- **Mindful movement** includes disciplines such as yoga, Pilates, tai chi, and other movement-based therapies that involve practicing specific postures or poses, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques. All of these therapies involve work on body symmetry, muscle strengthening, and breathing, as well as improving your strength, flexibility, and coordination to realign your body. Mindful movements will help you feel better, and they can help protect you from further injury and fatigue. The [Robax back pain exercise guide](https://www.robax.com/exercise-guide) demonstrates some stretches and strength training exercises that have been recommended by healthcare professionals.

- **Non-surgical spinal decompression** is a non-invasive technique that may offer relief from chronic lower back pain and neck pain.
During each treatment, the patient rests on a comfortable bed, secured by an upper and lower body harness. Using motorized traction, the spine is gently stretched, changing the force and position of the spine. This takes the pressure off the spinal disks—the gel-like cushions between the bones in your spine—and helps promote healing. Before or after therapy, you may have other types of treatment, including electrical stimulation, ultrasound, and heat/cold therapy.

When you are looking for alternative treatments to alleviate your back, neck or shoulder pain, referrals are the best way to find help. Your doctor or a hospital social worker may be able to recommend a good practitioner. Keep in mind that you may need to try a few different therapies or therapy providers before finding the right fit. Always discuss the benefits and risks of any therapy you are considering with your doctor before starting the treatment.