

Evidence for exercise therapy in mechanical neck disorders

In spite of neck disorders being so common in the population, little evidence supporting effective interventions has been identified. The objective of this systematic review was to determine if various exercise methods are effective in treating the different mechanical neck disorders occurring in adults. Sixteen trials were included: nine randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and seven randomized comparative trials (CTs).

The average PEDro score indicated moderate methodological quality. PEDro results showed the subject- and therapist-blinding criteria to be inappropriate. Findings revealed relatively strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of proprioceptive exercises and dynamic resisted strengthening exercises of the neck-shoulder musculature for chronic or frequent neck disorders. Moderate evidence was found to support early mobilizing exercises in acute whiplash patients. The evidence identified could not support the effectiveness of group exercise, neck schools or single sessions of extension-retraction exercises.

Clinicians are encouraged to incorporate these findings into their practice when planning the management of mechanical neck disorders. There is great need for well-designed RCTs to further investigate the topic and perhaps evaluate exercise effectiveness in relation to more specific disorders, e.g., discogenic vs facet joint originated disorder.

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