



Monday through Friday
8:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.

Saturdays & Holidays
9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

Sundays & Christmas
Noon to 4:00 P.M.

IT'S ABOUT PAIN

A monthly service of Kirkpatrick Family Care

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NON MEDICATION TREATMENTS FOR PAIN

Every day, I receive 5-6 announcements concerning the dangers of opioids. It's quite a change from the media coverage of opioids 4 years ago, when we were all castigated for **UNDERTREATMENT** and **DENIAL OF OPIOIDS** by New York Times reporter Judy Forman in ***A NATION IN PAIN***, published by Oxford Press.

In our charting of patients who need opioid treatment, we ask about non-medicinal treatments that they may or may not have utilized. The problem with most is financial---they are costly or they aren't covered by insurance. When these treatments cost \$100+ each, cost matters much! Here's the list:

Physical therapy: skilled experts in muscle/joint problems and relief of symptoms treat you with massage, stretching, and instruction in specific exercises. Sometimes they use heat, ice, ultrasound, or electricity to loosen spasm.

Ice/heat: This is cheap. You can do it yourself, for quick relief. But it's of little long term value.

TENS units: These electrical devices shock/vibrate tissues to relieve pain.

Therapeutic exercises: These are often helpful in improving and strengthening muscles, stability of which can reduce pain.

Chiropractic: Formerly involving just spinal manipulation "snapping" the spine, this specialty now also uses massage and various devices, too.

Acupuncture: sticking very thin needles in specific locations helps some patients more than others

Braces and splints: though sometimes very helpful, they may also cause muscular weakness or atrophy.

Massage: In essence this is a specialized version of PT or Chiropractic

Injections: Spinal "epidurals" (mixes of Novocain and cortisone) are performed by radiologists with CT or ultrasound guidance, but primary care and orthopedic providers often inject knees, wrists, shoulders. Podiatrists inject feet and ankles.

Surgeries: These are more expensive and difficult than the other treatments above, but offer an excellent chance for permanent cure and avoidance of opioids.

So there are at least 10 non-medicinal treatments that may help control your pain. The problem is cost. A one-day neck or back surgery may cost \$80,000. PT, massage, and chiropractic treatments cost \$100+ each, totaling around \$1,300 per month or over \$15,000 per year. In comparison, 5mg oxycodone 4x daily costs \$18-20 per month at WalMart, Safeway, or Fred Meyer. The annual \$250 for drugs is about the same as 2 therapy treatments. To erase the primary role of drug treatments, something has to be done about the patient's (and insurer's) costs for the above treatments and surgeries.