

# PHYSICAL THERAPY: A SAFE ALTERNATIVE TO OPIOIDS FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT



No one wants to live in pain. But no one should put their health at risk in an effort to be pain free.

Doctor-prescribed opioids are appropriate in some cases, but they just mask the pain—and opioid risks include depression, overdose, and addiction, plus withdrawal symptoms when stopping use. That’s why the CDC recommends safer alternatives like physical therapy to manage pain.

Physical therapists treat pain through movement, hands-on care, and patient education<sup>1</sup>—and by increasing physical activity you can also reduce your risk of other chronic diseases.

## WHY PHYSICAL THERAPY FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT?

Physical therapists treat pain through movement.	Opioids only mask the sensation of pain.
Physical therapy “side effects” include improved mobility, increased independence, decreased pain, and prevention of other health problems through movement and exercise.	Opioid side effects include depression, overdose, addiction, and withdrawal symptoms.
Physical therapy is effective for numerous conditions, and the CDC cited “high quality evidence” supporting exercise as part of physical therapist treatment for familiar conditions like low back pain, hip and knee osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia.	Opioid effectiveness for long-term pain management is inconclusive in many cases.

## OTHER REASONS TO #CHOOSEPT

**Alternative to surgery:** Physical therapy has been found to be as effective as surgery for conditions including meniscal tears and knee osteoarthritis<sup>2</sup>, and rotator cuff tears<sup>3</sup>.

**Individualized treatment:** Physical therapist treatment plans are tailored to each person’s needs and goals, taking preexisting conditions into account.

**Identification of potential risks:** Physical therapists can identify additional health issues, beyond what the patient initially reports, thereby improving a person’s overall health and quality of life.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Rundell SD, Davenport TE. Patient education based on principles of cognitive behavioral therapy for a patient with persistent low back pain: a case report. J Orthop Sports Phys Ther. 2010;40:494–501.
- 2 Katz JN, Brophy RH, Chaisson CE, et al. Surgery versus physical therapy for a meniscal tear and osteoarthritis [erratum in: N Engl J Med. 2013;369:683]. N Engl J Med. 2013;368:1675-1684.
- 3 Longo UG, Franceschi F, Berton A, et al. Conservative treatment and rotator cuff tear progression. Med Sport Sci. 2012;57:90–99.