



Does Physical Therapy Still Have a Place in the Treatment of Ankylosing Spondylitis?

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The advent of therapies with tumor necrosis factor inhibitors has dramatically improved the standard course of ankylosing spondylitis (AS). The improvements in outcomes were strong enough to prompt rheumatologist Dr. Mazen Elyan, of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, to pose the question, "Does physical therapy still have a place in the treatment of ankylosing spondylitis?"¹ Dr. Elyan's review of the literature concluded that all patients should receive instructions on proper posture and home exercise, and that physical therapy still offers benefits. That conclusion is congruent with the practice recommendations from the American Society of Ankylosing Spondylitis / European League Against Rheumatism,² which include exercise therapy.



Nghiem and Donohue reviewed six studies published in the past seven years. In each study, patients were allowed to continue their pharmacological therapies while rehabilitation interventions were conducted. **In each study, rehabilitation produced significantly positive results beyond the baseline of what was achieved with medications.** The authors state that medical therapy alone does not preclude the need for physical therapy or exercise.³ This still leaves the question of whether the supervision of a physical therapist is beneficial. If a treating physician is willing to teach a patient home exercises and posture intervention, is it enough to send a patient home with independent home exercises? The literature also addresses this question. While home exercise programs have been shown to independently produce positive results, **three trials have shown that supervised physical therapy produces results superior to home exercise alone** in terms of spinal mobility and global assessment.⁴ These studies are consistent with other literature which usually finds that patients with painful chronic conditions benefit from exercise supervision, because fear of self-injury typically causes these patients to under-exercise both in terms of frequency and intensity.

If you have a patient with ankylosing spondylitis, Enfield Health & Wellness Center is prepared to help. For your patients with AS, we will develop customized programs which can include:

- Postural training which has been shown to enhance normal exercise results and better maintain the gains from exercise.^{5,6}
- Spinal extension and other core exercises to help maintain spinal mobility and facilitate erect posture.
- Postural and ergonomic training such as advice on sleeping surfaces.
- Aerobic, chest expansion, and inspiratory muscle resistance exercises to prevent inspiratory muscle fatigue, improve oxygen intake, and improve vital capacity.⁷⁻¹⁰
- Manual therapy that can reduce pain and improve function.¹¹
- Individualized home exercise plans that can improve symptoms, mobility, and overall quality of life.
- For patients with a severe, active disease state, intensive rehabilitation that can provide rapid, short-term improvement in pain, stiffness, mobility, function, and quality of life.



One-to-One Care by a Licensed Professional

At Enfield Health & Wellness Center, all scheduled time with your patient is one-to-one time with a licensed therapy professional. We do not use aides or trainers with your patients. We do not attempt to assess your patient while simultaneously monitoring other patients. We feel this difference results in physical therapy programs that progress more efficiently and in better satisfied patients.

Please refer your patients to Enfield Health & Wellness Center

Doctor Recommended, Patient Preferred

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