

Conservative Treatment of Osteoarthritis



Emma Wightman
Registered Osteopath

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons recently released a summary of recommendations for the treatment based on evidence based medical research that is controlled for bias, transparent and is reproducible. The characteristics of studies that make strong evidence include use of a placebo or control treatment, sufficient numbers of subjects to determine if a true difference exists, and use of appropriate reliable measurement tools.

NOT RECOMMENDED FOR THE TREATMENT OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

- **Arthroscopy**
Strong: no benefit over physical therapy and medical treatment in 3 of 3 studies
- **Glucosamine and Chondroitin, Fish Oil**
Strong: no evidence of clinically important improvements over a placebo in 21 studies
- **Acupuncture**
Strong: no benefit over placebo in 8 studies
- **Hyaluronic Acid**
Strong: Quality of the supporting evidence is high. No benefit is demonstrated over placebo. 14 studies
- **Lateral wedge insoles**
Moderate: potential harm exceeds the benefits. No improvement in 4 of 5 studies
- **Needle Lavage**
Moderate: potential harm exceeds the benefits. No improvement in 2 of 2 studies
- **Electrotherapeutic modalities (electrical stimulation)**
Inconclusive: lack of compelling evidence that results in unclear balance between benefit and potential harm
- **Medial compartment unloader braces**
Inconclusive: lack of compelling evidence that results in unclear balance between benefit and potential harm
- **Corticosteroids**
Inconclusive: lack of compelling evidence that results in unclear balance between benefit and potential harm
- **Growth factor injections or Platelet Rich Plasma, Stem Cells**
Inconclusive: lack of compelling evidence that results in unclear balance between benefit and potential harm

RECOMMENDED FOR THE TREATMENT OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

- **Low impact aerobic exercise (eg cycling, swimming, walking, yoga)**
Strong: Quality of the supporting evidence is high. Significant benefit in 5 of 7 high strength studies
- **Weight Loss for those with BMI >25**
Strong: Quality of the supporting evidence is high. Beneficial in 3 of 3 studies
- **Non Steroidal Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**
Strong: quality of evidence demonstrating effectiveness is high. Meloxicam, Naproxen, Voltarol, Ibuprofen.
- **Supervised Physical Therapy** aimed at improving strength, balance and flexibility.
Strong: Quality of the supporting evidence is high.