

Exercise better than shockwave treatment for chronic shoulder pain

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Supervised exercises are more effective than shockwave treatment to relieve chronic shoulder pain, finds a study published in British Medical Journal today.

Shoulder pain is the fourth most common type of musculoskeletal pain reported to general practitioners and physiotherapists. Treatments often include physiotherapy, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and steroid injections. Physiotherapy can include shockwave treatment, ultrasound, exercises and acupuncture.

Several studies have suggested that shockwave treatment may not be effective, but it continues to be used widely.

So a team of researchers based in Oslo, Norway compared the effectiveness of radial extracorporeal shockwave treatment (low to medium energy impulses delivered into the tissue) with supervised exercises in patients with shoulder pain.

The study involved 104 men and women aged between 18 and 70 years attending the outpatient clinic at Ullevaal University Hospital in Oslo with shoulder pain lasting at least three months.

Participants were randomised to receive either radial extracorporeal shockwave treatment (one session weekly for four to six weeks) or supervised exercises (two 45 minute sessions weekly for up to 12 weeks).

Both groups were similar at the start of the study with regard to age, education, dominant arm affected and pain duration.

All patients were monitored at six, 12 and 18 weeks and were advised not to have any additional treatment except analgesics (including anti-inflammatory drugs) during the follow-up period. Pain and disability were measured using a recognised scoring index.

After 18 weeks, 32 (64%) of patients in the exercise group achieved a reduction in shoulder pain and disability scores compared with 18 (36%) in the shockwave treatment group.

More patients in the exercise group returned to work, while more patients in the shockwave treatment group had additional treatment after 12 weeks, suggesting that they were less satisfied.

These results are in agreement with results from previous trials recommending [exercise](#) therapy and do not strengthen the evidence for extracorporeal shockwave treatment, say the authors.

They conclude: "Supervised exercises were more effective than radial extracorporeal shockwave treatment for short term improvement in patients with subacromial shoulder pain."

Source: [British Medical Journal](#) ([news](#) : [web](#))

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