

# Earlier physical therapy may help older patients with back pain

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(HealthDay)—For older adults presenting to their primary care providers with a new visit for back pain, early referral to physical therapy (PT) services results in no clinically meaningful differences in outcomes; however, the extent of improvement in symptoms may be greater, according to a study published in the Aug. 1 issue of *The Spine Journal*.

Sean D. Rundell, D.P.T., Ph.D., from the University of Washington in Seattle, and colleagues compared clinical outcomes of [older adults](#) presenting to primary care for a new visit for back pain receiving early (0 to 28 days) or later (three to six months) PT services versus no PT. Data were included for 3,705 adults, aged 65 years and older.

The researchers found that at 12 months there was better functional status in the early PT group, with an adjusted mean Roland-Morris Disability Questionnaire of 1.1 points less than the no early PT group

and less back pain. At three to six months, there were no differences in pain or function between the early PT and no early PT groups. At 12 months, the odds of a 30 percent improvement in function or pain were no different between the matched groups; at 12 months the early PT group had increased odds of having a 50 percent improvement in function (odds ratio, 1.58). Within the early PT group, greater PT use was associated with better functional status.

"We found that among older adults presenting to their [primary care](#) providers for a new episode of back pain, early referral to PT resulted in no or minimal differences in [pain](#), function, or health-related quality at three, six, or 12 months compared with a matched group that did not receive early PT," the authors write. "Secondary analysis [showed] that patients initiating early PT may be somewhat more likely to experience 50 percent improvement in function at 12 months."

Two authors disclosed financial ties to the medical device and health care industries.

**More information:** [Abstract](#)  
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