

Do corticosteroids help treat radicular and non-radicular low back pain?

Clinical Question	Are corticosteroids effective and safe for the treatment of radicular low back pain, non-radicular low back pain and spinal stenosis?
Bottom Line	<p>For radicular low back pain (not due to spinal stenosis), five trials provided moderate-certainty evidence that systemic corticosteroids are probably more effective than placebo for pain measured as a continuous outcome at short-term and were also associated with small improvement in function at long-term follow-up, based on one large, low risk of bias trial.</p> <p>For non-radicular pain, systemic corticosteroids may slightly worsen pain and slightly improve function versus placebo at immediate- or short-term follow-up (low- or moderate-certainty evidence).</p> <p>For spinal stenosis, there is probably no difference between systemic corticosteroids and placebo at short-term follow-up.</p>
Caveat	<p>Regarding harms, there was low-certainty evidence that systemic corticosteroids are not associated with increased risk of any adverse event, serious adverse events, or hyperglycemia in trials of participants with radiculopathy.</p> <p>This review was restricted to placebo-controlled RCTs of systemic corticosteroids. The review did not evaluate the effects of systemic corticosteroids compared with other medications or non-pharmacologic treatments. It also did not evaluate the effects of non-systemic use of corticosteroids, such as administration as an epidural, intradiscal, facet joint, or trigger point injection or administration perioperatively.</p>
Context	Systemic corticosteroids administered through the oral, intravenous, or intramuscular routes have been used to treat various types of low back pain, including radicular back pain (not due to spinal stenosis), non-radicular back pain, and spinal stenosis. However, there is uncertainty about the benefits and harms of systemic corticosteroids for low back pain.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Chou R, Pinto RZ, Fu R, Lowe RA, Henschke N, McAuley JH, Dana T. Systemic corticosteroids for radicular and non-radicular low back pain. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2022, Issue 10. Art. No.: CD012450. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012450.pub2. This review contains 13 trials with a total of 1047 participants.
Pearls No. 713, November 2022, written by Assoc Professor Vanessa MB Jordan.	

Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD012450.pub2/full>