

Uncertainty over effectiveness of TENS for chronic pain**Clinical Question**

How effective is transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) in reducing pain in adults with chronic pain (excluding headache or migraine)?

Bottom Line

This overview was unable to derive any conclusions regarding the efficacy/effectiveness of 1) TENS versus sham, 2) TENS versus usual care or no treatment or waiting list control, 3) TENS plus active intervention versus active intervention alone or 4) comparisons between different types of TENS or TENS delivered using different stimulation parameters in people with chronic pain for pain intensity, disability, health-related quality of life, analgesic medication use or participant impression of change. It was not possible to make any statement regarding risk of adverse events with TENS.

Caveat

The methodological quality of the reviews was good, but the quality of the evidence within them was very low due to small study size and lack of data.

Context

Chronic pain (pain for longer than three months) is associated with a range of common conditions and can be difficult to treat effectively. TENS is a common treatment for pain conditions and involves using a small battery-operated unit to apply low-intensity electrical current to the body using electrodes attached to the skin.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Gibson W et al. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) for chronic pain – an overview of Cochrane Reviews. Cochrane Reviews, 2019, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD011890. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD011890.pub3. This review contains eight reviews involving 51 randomised controlled trials representing 2,895 participants.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD011890.pub3/full>