



COST EFFECTIVE ORTHOPEDIC CARE

Orthopedic issues fall into several categories:

Congenital/Developmental: Generally involves recognition and referral to orthopedics

Metabolic/Tumor: Frequently found and managed by PCP. Orthopedic involvement for "mechanical" complications.

Trauma: Unless mild trauma, usually involves referral to orthopedics

Overuse: Wear and tear. Much of sports medicine and worker's compensation. Clinical guidelines apply.

Degenerative: Getting "less young." Clinical guidelines apply.

Clinical Guideline: Conservative Treatment of Overuse or Degenerative orthopedic conditions.

1. Time heals many acute flare ups. Reassurance invaluable.
2. OTC analgesics (tylenol) and OTC NSAIDs are cost-effective and effective.
3. Relative rest: Advice to avoid "that which hurts." It doesn't mean stopping all activity, just the ones that provoke pain.
4. Home exercises: involve stretching and range of motion to preserve flexibility and/or strengthening. Later more specific exercises to prepare for the workplace or the play ground.
 - a. Phase 1: Stretching and range of motion
 - b. Phase 2: Strengthening
 - c. Phase 3: Sports or activity related exercises
 - d. Phase 4: Return to activity gradually.

The above steps cure the huge majority of orthopedic overuse and degenerative flare ups. We should all attempt to avoid expensive imaging interventions unless they will change the plan of care in a way that clearly benefits patients. Physical therapy is expensive to patients and insurance companies and patients have very few visits as part of their benefit packages. We should all agree to emphasize home exercises. Please consider referring to orthopedics before ordering expensive interventions such as MRI or Physical therapy. Orthopedics orders fewer MRIs and would utilize PT only when absolutely needed. Many times, the patients' PT benefits are used up before they come to see an orthopedic surgeon. The orthopedic surgeon may then offer surgery and physical therapy would be an important part of the recovery.