

## Cervical, Thoracic, and Lumbosacral Orthoses

**Condition:** Cervical, thoracic, and lumbosacral orthoses are devices/braces that may help relieve pain caused by problems in the spine. They are also used to restrict movement in people with back/neck injuries or after spinal surgery. Orthoses are also used in children with scoliosis (crooked spine - too much of a curve or bend to one side) to prevent progression of curvature.

**Background:** Problems in different parts of the spine – cervical (top – i.e. neck), thoracic (middle – i.e. chest level), and lumbosacral (lower – i.e. low back) – need different types of orthoses to keep the spine in the correct position and from moving too much. Some are soft and flexible while others are rigid.

**Risk Factors:** Orthoses may be less effective in overweight people. They can be especially uncomfortable to wear when it is hot and humid.

**History and Symptoms:** The doctor first needs to diagnose the problem and then decide if an orthosis is the right way to treat it.

**Diagnostic Process:** X-rays are used to help diagnose problems in the spine. MRI and CT scans may also be used to help choose the best device.

**Rehab Management:** Orthoses are just one part of a rehab program for people with spinal problems. A physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physician is uniquely trained and qualified to lead a multidisciplinary team and comprehensive approach to treatment of patients requiring orthoses. A PM&R physician can help determine the most appropriate type and the amount of time the orthosis should be worn as it may vary according to the condition it is treating. The treatment plan may also include exercise and physical therapy. Pain medications and anti-inflammatory drugs may also be used.

**Other Resources for Patients and Families:** Since orthoses may be uncomfortable, limit a person's ability to move and do usual activities, and make a person look different, patients need a lot of support and encouragement from family and friends.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is PM&R?**

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit [www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr](http://www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr).

### **What makes PM&R physicians unique?**

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

### **Why see a PM&R physician?**

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

### **How do I find a PM&R physician near me?**

Visit [www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician](http://www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician) or contact your primary care physician for a referral.