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Low back pain-related meta-analyses: caution is needed when interpreting published research results

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Abstract

The systematic reviews (SRs) including a meta-analysis are considered as the top level of evidence. Although the existence of more than a hundred of low back pain (LBP)-related SRs seems very appealing and might therefore suggest significant evidence on the topic, a deep analysis indicates that several of these SRs included only very few studies. Other SRs raise concerns because they included some randomized controlled trials (RCTs) which had a low methodological quality, or some studies which differed significantly regarding the studied populations and/or the experimental procedure. The sometimes controversial results of different SRs conducted on the same topic also highlight the significant influence of the inclusion/exclusion criteria used in the SRs to select the articles. To conclude, although meta-analyses are at the top of the evidence pyramid and have several strengths, the conclusions drawn from SRs should always be interpreted with caution because they can also have weaknesses. This is true, whether it be for LBP-related SRs including a meta-analysis, or any other. Therefore a critical analysis of any SR is always needed before integrating the results of the SR in its own clinical

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