

**2018 ACR/SAA/SPARTAN Updated Recommendations
for the Management of Axial Spondyloarthritis**

Project Plan – November 2017

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ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

This updated guideline is being developed as a collaborative project of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), the Spondylitis Association of America (SAA) and the Spondyloarthritis Research and Treatment Network (SPARTAN). The ACR and SAA are funding the project.

NOTICE OF INTENT

This announcement serves to notify ACR members, patients, and the larger rheumatology community of our plans to update and expand the 2015 ACR/SAA/SPARTAN Recommendations for the Treatment of Ankylosing Spondylitis and Non-radiographic Axial Spondyloarthritis (1). While we welcome comments on this plan, the rapid timeline of this project will not permit us to include modifications to this proposal. However, we anticipate that recommendations from the community will be included in future updates of these recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Axial spondyloarthritis (axial SpA) is a form of chronic inflammatory arthritis characterized by sacroiliitis, extra-articular manifestations, and spinal and peripheral enthesitis; when these progress to sacroiliac joint and spinal fusion the condition is known as ankylosing spondylitis (AS) (2). Symptoms commonly include back and hip pain, peripheral joint pain, and fatigue, and are variable in severity. Spinal fusion develops gradually and may lead to reduced spine and neck flexibility.

The hallmarks of AS are symmetric sacroiliitis, more extensive spinal fusion, and a stronger association with HLA-B27 than in other types of spondyloarthritis (SpA) (3). The sacroiliac and spinal features are

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27 emphasized in the modified New York criteria for the classification of AS (4). However, a limitation of
28 these criteria is that these features may take years to develop, thereby excluding patients early in the
29 course of SpA who may not yet have developed radiographically evident changes. Classification criteria
30 that would apply to both early and later stage patients have been proposed by the Assessment of
31 Spondyloarthritis International Society, included under the umbrella term axial SpA (5). These updated
32 recommendations will be focused on patients with axial SpA (meeting the ASAS axial SpA criteria),
33 including AS (meeting the modified New York criteria).

34

35 The goals of treatment of axial SpA are to reduce symptoms, improve and maintain spinal flexibility and
36 normal posture, reduce functional limitations, and decrease complications of the disease. The mainstays
37 of treatment have been nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications, exercise and physical therapy, and
38 tumor necrosis factor-alpha inhibitors. Since the publication of the 2015 treatment recommendations,
39 additional medications have become available, prompting a need to reevaluate previous
40 recommendation and incorporate new medications into the recommendations. Consequently, this will
41 be a selective update largely focused on pharmacological treatments, rather than a comprehensive
42 update of all previous recommendations. However, we will also address some topics not included in the
43 previous recommendations.

44

OBJECTIVES

45

46
47 The objective of this project is to develop updated recommendations for the treatment of patients with
48 axial SpA, including AS. Specifically, we aim to:

49

- 50 1. Develop updated recommendations for the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications,
51 oral small molecules, and biologics (including biosimilars).
- 52 2. Develop recommendations for the role of magnetic resonance imaging and radiography in
53 longitudinal patient management.
- 54 3. Develop recommendations for the role of a treat-to-target strategy in the care of patients.

55

METHODS

56

Identification of Studies

57

58 Literature search strategies, based on PICO questions (Population/patients, Intervention, Comparator,
59 and Outcomes; *see Appendix A*) will be developed by a research librarian, with input from the Core
60 Team, including the principal investigator and systematic literature review leader. The search strategies
61 will be peer reviewed by another medical librarian using Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies
62 (PRESS) (6). Searches will be performed in OVID Medline (1946 +), Embase (1974 +), the Cochrane
63 Library, and PubMed (mid-1960s +).

64

65 The search strategies will be developed using the controlled vocabulary or thesauri language for each
66 database: Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) for OVID Medline, PubMed and Cochrane Library; and
67 Emtree terms for Embase. Text words will also be used in OVID Medline, PubMed, and Embase, and
68 keyword/title/abstract words in the Cochrane Library.

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72 *Search Limits*

73

74 Only English language articles were retrieved.

75

76 *Grey Literature*

77

78 The websites of appropriate agencies, such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ),
79 will be searched for peer-reviewed reports not indexed by electronic databases.

80

81 *Literature Search Update*

82

83 Literature searches will be updated just before the voting panel meeting to ensure completeness.

84

85 *Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria*

86

87 See PICO questions (*Appendix A*), which outline the defined patient population, interventions,
88 comparators and outcomes.

89

90 *Management of Studies and Data*

91

92 References and abstracts will be imported into bibliographic management software (Reference
93 Manager) (7), duplicates removed, and exported to Distiller SR, a web-based systematic review manager
94 (8). Screening and data abstraction forms will occur in Distiller SR. Search results will be divided among
95 reviewers, and two reviewers are screening each title/abstract, with disagreements at the title/abstract
96 screening stage defaulting to inclusion for full manuscript review. Following the same dual review
97 process, disagreements at the full manuscript screening stage will be discussed and adjudicated by the
98 literature review leadership, if necessary.

99

100 *Phases*

101

- 102 1. A search for randomized controlled trials and observational studies about interventions aimed
103 at the pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic management of axial SpA will be performed to
104 determine existing studies covering outcomes of interest. Subsequently, identified studies will
105 be assessed using the RevMan (9) and GRADE Pro tools (10).
- 106 2. Chosen studies will be assessed for risk of bias using modified versions of the Cochrane Risk of
107 Bias tool (11) and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (12).
- 108 3. Additionally, recently published systematic reviews covering outcomes of interest will also be
109 sought and used for reference cross-checking.

110

111 *GRADE Methodology*

112

113 GRADE methodology (13) will be used in this project to grade available evidence and facilitate
114 development of recommendations. The certainty in the evidence (also known as 'quality' of evidence)
115 will be graded as high, moderate, low or very low. The strength of recommendations will be graded as
116 strong or conditional. The strength of recommendations will not depend solely on the certainty in the

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117 evidence, but also on patient preferences and values, and the weight between benefits and harms. A
118 series of articles that describe the GRADE methodology can be found on the GRADE working group's
119 website: www.gradeworkinggroup.org.

120

Analysis and Synthesis

122

123 The literature review team will analyze and synthesize data from included studies that address the PICO
124 questions. An evidence profile, including a GRADE Summary of Findings table, will be prepared for each
125 PICO question using Review Manager (RevMan) (7) and GRADEprofiler (GRADEpro) software (10). The
126 Summary of Findings table contains the benefits and harms for each outcome across studies, the
127 assumed and corresponding risk for comparators and interventions (95% CI), the absolute risk and
128 relative effect (95% CI), the number of participants/number of studies, and the certainty in the evidence
129 for each critical and important outcome (i.e., high, moderate, low or very low).

130

131 The evidence profile documents the overall certainty in the evidence for each critical and important
132 outcome across studies and summarizes the rationale of the GRADE criteria for downgrading (risk of
133 bias, inconsistency, indirectness, imprecision and publication bias), or upgrading the certainty in a body
134 of evidence (large magnitude of effect, dose-response gradient, and all plausible confounding that
135 would reduce a demonstrated effect).

136

Development of Recommendation Statements

138

139 PICO questions will be revised into drafted recommendation statements. Using the GRADE Evidence
140 Profiles and Summaries of Findings tables, the voting panel, consisting of 11 rheumatologists, one
141 pharmacist and two patient representatives, will consider the drafted recommendation statements in
142 two stages. The first assessment will be done individually, and the results will be anonymous; this vote
143 will only be used to determine where consensus might or might not already exist and develop the voting
144 panel meeting agenda. At the face-to-face voting panel meeting, chaired by the principal investigator,
145 the panelists will discuss the evidence in the context of their clinical experience and expertise, and
146 considering patient values and preferences, to arrive at consensus on the final recommendations. The
147 voting panel meeting discussions will be supported by the literature review leader and selected
148 members of the literature review team, who will attend the meeting to provide details about the
149 evidence, as requested.

150

PLANNED APPENDICES (AT MINIMUM)

152

153 A. Final literature search strategies

154 B. GRADE evidence profiles and summary of findings tables for each PICO question

155

AUTHORSHIP

157

158 Authorship of the guideline will include: principal investigator, Dr. Michael Ward, as the lead author; Dr.
159 Liron Caplan, literature review leader; and Dr. Atul Deodhar, content expert. Members of the literature
160 review team and voting panel will also be authors. The PI will determine final authorship, dependent on

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161 the efforts made by individuals throughout the guideline development process, using international
162 authorship standards as guidance.

163

164 **DISCLOSURES/CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

165

166 The ACR's disclosure and COI policies for guideline development will be followed for this project. These
167 can be found in the ACR Guideline Manual on [this page of the ACR web site](#), under Policies &
168 Procedures. *See Appendix B for participant disclosures.*

169

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171

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200 **APPENDIX A – PICO Questions** *(NOTE: The questions below are not numbered sequentially because this is an update of a previous*
201 *guideline, and the numbers here correspond to the numbers of the same or similar questions from the previous guideline. New*
202 *questions (#58-70) were given numbers that began at the end of the previous list.)*

203

204 **PHARMACOLOGIC THERAPY:**

205

206 **PICO 1.** In adults with active or stable AS, is continuous treatment with NSAIDs more effective than on-demand treatment
207 with NSAIDs in improving outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

208

209 **PICO 5.** In adults with active AS, are certain TNFi more effective than other TNFi in improving outcomes? [update lit review
210 and add TNF biosimilar data]

211

212 **PICO 6.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, are TNFi more effective than no treatment with TNFi in
213 improving outcomes? [update lit review and add TNF biosimilar data]

214

215 **PICO 7.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with an oral small molecule more effective than
216 no treatment with an oral small molecule in improving outcomes? [update lit review and add tofacitinib data]

217

218 **PICO 8.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs and who have contraindications to TNFi, is treatment with a
219 non-TNFi biologic more effective than treatment with an oral small molecule in improving outcomes? [update lit review and
220 add tofacitinib and secukinumab data]

221

222 **PICO 9.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a different TNFi more
223 effective than adding methotrexate or sulfasalazine in improving outcomes? [update lit review]

224

225 **PICO 10.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a different TNFi more
226 effective than switching to a non-TNFi biologic in improving outcomes? [update lit review and add TNF biosimilar and
227 secukinumab data]

228

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229 **PICO 11.** In adults with stable AS on treatment with TNFi and NSAIDs, is continuing both medications more effective than
230 continuing treatment with TNFi alone in improving outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

231
232 **PICO 12.** In adults with stable AS on treatment with TNFi and an oral small molecule, is continuing both medications more
233 effective than withdrawing one treatment and continuing either TNFi or the oral small molecule alone in improving
234 outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

235
236 **PICO 33.** In adults with active or stable non-radiographic axial SpA, is continuous treatment with NSAIDs more effective than
237 on-demand treatment with NSAIDs in improving outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

238
239 **PICO 37.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA, are certain TNFi more effective than other TNFi in improving
240 outcomes? [update lit review and add TNF biosimilar data]

241
242 **PICO 38.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, are TNFi more effective than no
243 treatment with TNFi in improving outcomes? [update lit review and add TNF biosimilar data]

244
245 **PICO 39.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with an oral small
246 molecule more effective than no treatment with an oral small molecule in improving outcomes? [update lit review and add
247 tofacitinib data]

248
249 **PICO 40.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs and who have contraindications to
250 TNFi, is treatment with a non-TNFi biologic more effective than treatment with an oral small molecule in improving
251 outcomes? [update lit review and add tofacitinib and secukinumab data]

252
253 **PICO 41.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a
254 different TNFi more effective than adding methotrexate or sulfasalazine in improving outcomes? [update lit review]

255

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256 **PICO 42.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a
257 different TNFi more effective than switching to a non-TNFi biologic in improving outcomes? [update lit review and add TNF
258 biosimilar and secukinumab data]

259
260 **PICO 43.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA on treatment with TNFi and NSAIDs, is continuing both medications
261 more effective than continuing treatment with TNFi alone in improving outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

262
263 **PICO 44.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA on treatment with TNFi and an oral small molecule, is continuing
264 both medications more effective than withdrawing one treatment and continuing either TNFi or the oral small molecule
265 alone in improving outcomes? [no change in PICO, update lit review]

266

267 **TREATMENT OF PATIENTS WITH SPECIFIC IMPAIRMENTS OR COMORBID CONDITIONS:**

268

269 **PICO 32.** In adults with AS and inflammatory bowel disease, is treatment with certain biologics more effective than others in
270 improving outcomes? [update lit review, add secukinumab data]

271

272 **PICO 29.** In adults with AS and recurrent attacks of uveitis, is treatment with certain biologics more effective than others in
273 improving outcomes? [update lit review, add secukinumab data]

274

275 ***[NOTE: all questions below are NEW QUESTIONS, not similar to or the same as the PICOs in the previous guideline]***

276

277 **PHARMACOLOGIC THERAPY:**

278

279 **PICO 58.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with secukinumab more effective than no
280 treatment with secukinumab in improving outcomes?

281

282 **PICO 59.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with secukinumab more effective than
283 treatment with TNFi in improving outcomes?

284

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285 **PICO 60.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with tofacitinib more effective than treatment
286 with TNFi in improving outcomes?
287

288 **PICO 61.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with tofacitinib more effective than treatment
289 with secukinumab in improving outcomes?
290

291 **PICO 62.** In adults with active AS despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a different originator TNFi
292 more effective than switching to TNFi biosimilar in improving outcomes?
293

294 **PICO 63.** In adults with stable AS on an originator TNFi, is continuation of treatment more effective than switching to a
295 biosimilar TNFi in improving outcomes?
296

297 **PICO 64.** In adults with either active or stable AS on treatment with TNFi, is co-treatment with low-dose methotrexate more
298 effective than no co-treatment with low-dose methotrexate in improving outcomes?
299

300 **PICO 65.** In adults with stable AS on treatment with a biologic, is tapering of the biologic dose more effective than no
301 tapering in improving outcomes?
302

303 **PICO 66.** In adults with stable AS on treatment with a biologic, is discontinuation of the biologic more effective than no
304 discontinuation in improving outcomes?
305

306 **PICO 67.** In adults with active AS, is a treat-to-target strategy using a target of ASDAS <1.3 (or <2.1) more effective than a
307 symptom-prompted treatment strategy in improving outcomes?
308

309 **IMAGING:**

310
311 **PICO 68.** In adults with stable AS, is obtaining a spinal or pelvis MRI to confirm inactivity more effective than not obtaining an
312 MRI in improving outcomes?
313

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314 **PICO 69.** In adults with AS of unclear activity while on a biologic, is obtaining a spinal or pelvis MRI to assess activity more
315 effective than not obtaining an MRI in improving outcomes?
316

317 **PICO 70.** In adults with active or stable AS on any treatment, is obtaining repeat spine radiographs at a scheduled interval
318 (e.g., every 2 years) more effective than not obtaining scheduled radiographs in improving outcomes?
319

320 **PHARMACOLOGIC THERAPY:**
321

322 **PICO 71.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with secukinumab
323 more effective than no treatment with secukinumab in improving outcomes?
324

325 **PICO 72.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with secukinumab
326 more effective than treatment with TNFi in improving outcomes?
327

328 **PICO 73.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with tofacitinib more
329 effective than treatment with TNFi in improving outcomes?
330

331 **PICO 74.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with NSAIDs, is treatment with tofacitinib more
332 effective than treatment with secukinumab in improving outcomes?
333

334 **PICO 75.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA despite treatment with the first TNFi agent used, is switching to a
335 different originator TNFi more effective than switching to TNFi biosimilar in improving outcomes?
336

337 **PICO 76.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA on an originator TNFi, is continuation of treatment more effective
338 than switching to a biosimilar TNFi in improving outcomes?
339

340 **PICO 77.** In adults with either active or stable non-radiographic axial SpA on treatment with TNFi, is co-treatment with low-
341 dose methotrexate more effective than no co-treatment with low-dose methotrexate in improving outcomes?
342

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343 **PICO 78.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA on treatment with a biologic, is tapering of the biologic dose more
344 effective than no tapering in improving outcomes?

345
346 **PICO 79.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA on treatment with a biologic, is discontinuation of the biologic
347 more effective than no discontinuation in improving outcomes?

348
349 **PICO 80.** In adults with active non-radiographic axial SpA, is a treat-to-target strategy using a target of ASDAS <1.3 (or <2.1)
350 more effective than a symptom-prompted treatment strategy in improving outcomes?

351
352 **IMAGING:**

353
354 **PICO 81.** In adults with stable non-radiographic axial SpA, is obtaining a spinal or pelvis MRI to confirm inactivity more
355 effective than not obtaining an MRI in improving outcomes?

356
357 **PICO 82.** In adults with non-radiographic axial SpA of unclear activity while on a biologic, is obtaining a spinal or pelvis MRI to
358 assess activity more effective than not obtaining an MRI in improving outcomes?

359
360 **PICO 83.** In adults with active or stable non-radiographic axial SpA on any treatment, is obtaining repeat spine radiographs at
361 a scheduled interval (e.g., every 2 years) more effective than not obtaining scheduled radiographs in improving outcomes?

