

## **TRICARE to Exclude Controversial Back Pain Therapy from Coverage**

After years of not issuing guidance on the use of transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) to treat lower back pain, Tricare is officially excluding the machines from coverage, effective June 1.

Tricare officials said they decided to stop letting the Tricare contractors decide whether TENS was medically necessary after studies by the American College of Physicians, along with the Defense Department and Department of Veterans Affairs, found "insufficient evidence" that the treatment is effective in treating acute, subacute and chronic lower-back pain.

"Additionally, reliable evidence in published medical literature increasingly finds that TENS for lower back pain is no more effective than sham TENS (placebo)," a Tricare official said via email Friday.

TENS is electrical stimulation to nerves, muscles and tendons to relieve pain. It can be administered in a clinic or at home with a prescribed machine. Several patients in one 2011 study experienced skin irritation, one to the point of dropping out.