



Tenderness Grading, Soft Tissue

The recommendations in this protocol apply to grading tissue tenderness. Note: This grading system is NOT used to grade muscle tone or tightness. An algometer may also be used to better quantify tenderness. (See CSPE protocol: Algometer.)

When applying static palpation to joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments, or superficial tissue in general, palpatory pain (i.e. tenderness) can be graded based on the patient's response.

The following is a recommended scale that can be used for initial assessment and as an outcome measure.

Grading Scale for Tenderness

+1/4 T, or grade 1/4 tenderness	Tenderness with no physical response
+2/4 T, or grade 2/4 tenderness	Tenderness with grimace, wince, and/or flinch
+3/4 T, or grade 3/4 tenderness	Tenderness with withdrawal (positive jump sign)
+4/4 T, or grade 4/4 tenderness	Non-noxious stimuli (e.g., superficial palpation, gentle percussion) results in patient withdrawal or patient refusal to be palpated due to pain

(Modified after Cipriano 2010)

Charting

The following are recommendations for charting:

- Note if the tender point *reproduces* the presenting complaint.
- Chart if tenderness is greater on the right or left (e.g., R > L).

- Note if there is a point of maximum tenderness (e.g., several points are graded as +1/4 T, but the patient can identify that one point is clearly more tender than any other).

In a narrative format, an example of appropriate language would be “grade 1/4 tenderness.” Also, one can consider writing a description, e.g., “patient demonstrated a jump sign.”

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REFERENCES

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