"Lie on your right side. Let your left arm roll back. Now gently press your legs down against my hand here. That’s good. Hold. Hold. Relax." This is what you might hear a Physical Therapist say to you while performing a muscle energy technique (MET).

More and more therapists are using METs to treat patients with new cases of low back pain. The patient contracts his or her muscles in a way that gives a corrective force to the spine. The therapist makes sure the muscle contracts in the exact direction needed and with just the right amount of force. The whole exercise may only take five minutes. Patients are shown how to do a similar exercise at home. Home exercises help keep the spine in good alignment after METs.

In this study Physical Therapists measured the results of METs. Two groups of patients were treated. Both groups got a certain kind of exercise to retrain muscles. One group also got the added METs. After eight sessions over four weeks, the groups were compared. The group getting exercise plus MET came out better. They had better motion and more function with less pain.

The authors point out this is the first study on METs. It's also a small "get started" or pilot study. The results must be verified by other studies. Research with more patients is needed. METs should be compared to other methods of treatment, too.