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Alternative Approaches to Pain Relief

By Peter Donald

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by: **Peter Donald**

Pain. The great leveler. The rich feel it. So do the poor, the happy, the sad, tall, and short. And, of course, article writers, too. It's therefore not surprising to note that since the dawn of time, humans have attempted to discover ways to reduce pain. In some respect, our ability to experience pain, and seek ways to solve it, connects us more than anything else. But what exactly is pain and how do we deal with it?

Pain is a message sent by the body to the brain, signaling the presence of disease, injury or strain. Without pain, you would be unaware of many problems – from torn ligaments to appendicitis. Pain is simply, Mother Nature's way of telling you something is wrong.

Many of us kill the messenger with narcotics, anti-depressants and tranquilizers that take care of the symptoms, but not the cause of the pain. This kind of treatment cannot only mask symptoms of serious disease, but can also create a cycle of chronic pain.

Not all pain though, serves a useful function. While acute pain, as described above can alert us to a serious problem, chronic pain can linger long after an ailment or injury has healed in the body. Examples of chronic pain include backache, migraines and arthritis. In these cases, pain management, as opposed to a cure, may become the goal of treatment.

The psychological effects that accompany recovery from a disease or injury heighten chronic pain. A loss of confidence is often triggered by prolonged periods of rest and inactivity that cause a loss of physical strength, endurance and flexibility. If the injury has prevented you from performing your usual duties, you may succumb to frustration and depression. Impatience is chronic pain's best friend as many individuals overexert themselves before they have completely healed, thus triggering more pain.

Various treatments can help alleviate chronic pain. Some treatments do so on a purely physical level by interfering with signals from the nerves to the brain or desensitizing the nerves. The following

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sections are meant to introduce you to some of the ways of dealing with pain without relying on non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, narcotics, tranquilizers or anti-depressants.

For many people, particularly those in the western world, pain relief solutions such as acupuncture, and herbal medicine are novel concepts. However, the rest of the world is probably wondering what the fuss is about, because these traditional approaches to pain relief have been around for thousands of years; Traditional Chinese Medicine, which relies on various techniques and herbs in order to balance the body's internal energy, is over 5,000 years old.

Acupuncture: the ancient Chinese Practice of acupuncture is based on the belief that health is determined by the level of chi (vital life energy) that is in the body. This energy is thought to move through the body through pathways called meridians, which connect to specific organs in the body. Acupuncturists insert needles into points on the body that connect to these channels to release blocked "chi" that might be the cause of pain. During acupuncture treatment, the acupuncturist inserts

thin needles for anywhere from a few minutes to a half an hour into specific points on the body. This practice is thought to stimulate endorphins, the body's natural painkillers and is useful for the treatment of a variety of disorders including backache, sinus pain, jaw pain, spinal disorders, withdrawal and mental disorders.

Herbs: another important part of traditional Chinese medicine is herbal medicine. Herbs have been used for centuries for their pain relieving qualities. Here are some herbs that are recommended for common disorders:

Cramps & Spasms: angelica, cramp bar, kava, rosemary, valerian root.

Nerve Pain: capsaicin, chamomile, gotu kola, licorice, white willow.

Back Pain: hops, wood betony, passionflower.

Migraine: feverfew, linden, skullcap.

Headaches: peppermint, spearmint.

Joint pain: ginger, sea cucumber.

Meditation: meditation, which has also been practiced for thousands of years, is a conscious attempt to calm the mind so that it is not cluttered with thoughts and anxieties that might be contributing to an unnecessary belief in the existence of pain. There are hundreds of different meditation techniques, but mostly they all fall into three categories: concentrative, mindful and transcendental meditation. During concentrative meditation, focusing on a single sound, object or one's breath, produces a tranquil mind that facilitates the production of pain-relieving endorphins. During mindful meditations, the mind is encouraged to become aware of, but not reactive to thoughts, feelings and sensations in order to achieve a tranquil state of mind.

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Nutrition: eating a well balanced diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables is thought to be the best way raise your pain threshold or resistance to pain. A deficiency in any of the main vitamins (A, B, C, D or E) can cause chronic pain. Vitamin E is used to treat joint pain. A deficiency in calcium, iron, magnesium and other minerals may also lower your pain threshold. A calcium magnesium supplement taken in a 2:1 ratio of calcium to magnesium is thought to relieve joint pain and headaches. Manganese is a vitamin that is sometimes used for chronic headaches and neuralgia. A deficiency of the B vitamins is also thought to cause nervousness, headaches and chronic pain.

Aromatherapy: sniffing or applying essential oils is thought to change an individual's brain chemistry so that pleasurable neuro-transmitters called endorphins are released to relieve pain. Geranium, jasmine, juniper, lavender, peppermint, rose, rosemary and thyme are oils commonly used for this purpose.

Guided Imagery: research has indicated that bodily functions that were previously thought to be beyond conscious control, such as chronic pain, can be controlled thorough the use of visualization. Guided imagery encourages the sufferer to think in pictures that eliminate negative thoughts thus raising levels of pleasurable brain chemicals, such as serotonin, decreasing anxiety and increasing the effectiveness of the immune system. Through guided imagery, the mind conjures up mental scenes in order to better direct the body's energy. For instance, if an individual is suffering from a stabbing pain, he or she might want to imagine a knife being removed from the spot and a subsequent glowing feeling

of relief. Guided imagery has been used successfully to manage the pain of headaches, sinus problems, arthritis and cancer.

Biofeedback combines a variety of relaxation methods, such as guided imagery and meditation with the use of instruments that monitor the individual's responses to the therapy. After many treatments, biofeedback is thought to train the individual to consciously regulate autonomic functions such as heart rate, blood pressure and other processes that are commonly believed to be out of our control. During a session, electrodes connected to a monitoring unit are taped to the skin. The monitor measures skin temperature, pulse, blood pressure, muscle tension and brain activity to determine the success of the relaxation technique. Eventually, over time, biofeedback can train an individual to control the pain of such disorders as TMJ, headaches and migraines.

It is difficult to imagine a world without pain; where would our poetry come from? What would divas sing about? Given that pain is probably always going to be a part of our world, it is of critical importance that we understand the various methods that exist to manage that pain. For some of us, that remedy may lie in the traditional realm, while for others it will be through prescription drugs or some other alternative. Regardless of what remedy you choose, make sure you inform yourself of the various pain treatment options open to you, and by doing so, you may just reduce the amount of suffering in your life. And isn't that, in some respect, the goal that we all strive towards?

It is important to note that the above suggestions do not represent cures for conditions, but more represent strategies and opportunities to manage your chronic pain. It is also recommended that you consult with your health practitioner before embarking on any new pain management program.

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Peter Donald is a writer and Webmaster at www.rx-site.com, a site that offers medical information, resources and articles on various health topics including pain relief and weight loss.

5 Simple Steps For Ridding Yourself Of Back Pain

By Jesse Cannone

Millions of people suffer from back pain unnecessarily when there is actually a very simple solution, according to Jesse Cannone, certified personal trainer and back pain specialist. "Unfortunately, many people are led to believe that back pain is normal and were all supposed to experience it... well, thankfully, that's not the case. Eliminating back pain is not nearly as difficult as most people think or are led to believe... it can actually be easy!" says Cannone.

Here's the simple system that **MUST** be followed if you are looking for real, long-term, lasting relief:

1. Identify the cause - nearly all of the treatments people receive for back pain only focus on the symptoms and the healthcare professionals zoom in on only the problem area. The real key in eliminating back pain is to find out exactly what's causing the problem... and most of the time it's not even the back!
2. Address both the cause and the symptom - the best approach is a combination of treating the symptoms for pain relief while also addressing the underlying cause.
3. Be aware - many people suffering from back pain are not in tune with their bodies and during their treatment they do not realize what is working and what is not. In order to achieve long-term relief you have to understand how your body works, what's causing the problem, and what changes have to be made to correct it.
4. Consistent Focused Action – achieving success in anything requires consistency and focused action. Most people with back pain won't make the time to work on their problem each day... instead they take pain killers which mask the pain and allow them to cause more damage while they continue with their life.
5. Don't do what doesn't work – we already know that most traditional treatments for back pain don't work.... why waste your time, energy, and money? The real key to eliminating back pain is to identify the true cause of the pain and then address it with a combination of treatments to treat both the cause and symptoms. Over 80% of all back pain is caused by muscle imbalances... NOT a lack of pain killers or surgery! Find out what's going on in your body and take action.

Article by Jesse Cannone of

Jesse is a certified personal fitness

trainer and post-rehab specialist and he has helped hundreds of individuals to eliminate their back pain. Visit his site now and be sure to sign up for his free email course on eliminating back pain.

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