



Alternative treatment options

Chronic pain can represent a nearly insurmountable hardship in life. It can interfere with one's ability to enjoy major portions of daily life including sleep, work, concentration, exercise and socialization.

Common types of debilitating pain include lower back, bone or joint pain, arthritis, muscle pain and fibromyalgia, in addition to cancer pain, headaches and migraines.

Millions of Americans live with such chronic pain, and many seek relief from the pain through prescription pain medications. However, the many risks and side effects of using medications such as opioid painkillers can make them an unviable solution for some. Averse risks of use include overdose, withdrawal and drug dependence, and addiction to the opioid medications.

People with mild and even moderate chronic pain can learn to manage their conditions without taking any medications regularly. Helpful activities can include exercise, lifestyle changes, behavioral therapy, acupuncture, massage, psychotherapy and more. A number of these treatment options are described briefly below.

Studies have shown that there are non-medication strategies and treatments that can significantly reduce pain and increase one's ability to function.

- **Acupuncture.** Acupuncture involves inserting thin needles into your body to stimulate specific points and regulate the flow of “qi” (vital energy) throughout your body. This practice is widely used for many types of pain, ranging from low back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome to osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia.
- **Reduction in alcohol intake.** Pain makes sleep difficult, and alcohol can make sleep problems worse. If you're living with chronic pain, drinking less or no alcohol can improve your quality of life.
- **Massage therapy.** Massage provides positive effects for people with many types of chronic pain including back and neck pain. Massage therapy stimulates your brain to produce endorphins (natural pain-relieving chemicals).
- **Chiropractic care.** Chiropractic care can help your spine and other body parts to get back into proper alignment, which helps relieve pain and supports the body's natural healing processes.
- **Meditation or deep breathing.** Deep breathing and meditation are techniques that help your body relax, which can ease pain. Deep breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths, and exhaling slowly to let the whole body relax a little more with each breath.
- **Exercise.** Exercise prompts the release of pain-relieving endorphins, which can help to block pain signals from reaching your brain. For conditions such as osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia, low-impact activity such as walking, biking, and yoga can ease pain and improve function.

- **A healthy diet.** Careful selection of food can help prevent inflammation in the body. Inflammation can lead to physical pain in muscles, joints and tissues over time. Chronic inflammation is a leading cause of numerous chronic diseases and pain. Highly processed and high-sugar foods such as pastries, candy, sugared soda, fast food, snack chips, refined white flour and the like will promote inflammation.
- **Hypnosis.** Hypnosis is a state of consciousness involving focused attention. It works by heightening one's responsiveness to suggestions that can alter the physiological state, behaviors and emotions. Studies have shown significant benefits for pain relief of conditions including headache, backache, fibromyalgia, cancer pain, and more.
- **Stress reduction.** Stress can make chronic pain worse. Negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, and anger can increase the body's sensitivity to pain. By learning how to take control of stress, you may find some relief from chronic pain.
- **Support groups and psychotherapy.** Spending time with people who live with chronic pain and who understand what you're going through can help you feel less alone. Meeting with a support group can also help you identify coping strategies to deal with pain.

Additional resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids

Family Doctor

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/opioid-addiction.html>

Drugfree.org

www.drugfree.org

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