

# Pain Relief

Pain is a signal from the body and means that some part of your body needs attention so the first thing is to look for the cause of the pain. However sometimes the cause can't be found and then some kind of pain relief is needed.

## Drugs

The commonest way to relieve pain is with drugs. These can be very useful but the biggest difficulty is that they are commonly limited by adverse effects. Another problem is that there are fewer painkilling drugs than most people think. A further problem is that opiate drugs are addictive and can make the pain worse over time. Here's a list of some of the most commonly used painkillers.

**Paracetamol** – this gives mild pain relief. It is good for bone pain though. Side effects are uncommon.

**Codeine and Dihydrocodeine** – these are often combined with paracetamol (Co-codamol and Co-dydramol). They are moderately strong painkillers. People can feel spacey with them and constipation is a troublesome side effect in many people. These drugs can be addictive (see below).

**Tramadol** – this is a fairly strong painkiller. People can feel spacey with these as well and constipation occurs though less so than with codeine. Addiction is an issue here as well.

**Anti-inflammatory drugs** – such as ibuprofen, naproxen and diclofenac. These are often helpful but stomach pains can be a problem especially after using them for a while. These drugs should be taken after food. Their use has been linked with increased risk of heart disease. They can also be used as gels which can be applied to a painful area.

Other drugs can be used for so-called neuropathic or nerve pain: these include amitriptyline, gabapentin, pregabalin. Again they don't suit everyone and side-effects are common. Gabapentin and pregabalin are highly addictive.

Morphine and morphine patches can also be useful. Constipation tends to be the main side-effect.

## The Danger of Addiction

Opiate drugs (morphine, codeine, tramadol) are useful for acute pain but in chronic pain because they can induce addiction and paradoxically make the problem worse. It is thought 2 million Americans are addicted to these drugs. The problem is that they only control the pain for a time and then the pain increases through what is called "opiate induced sensitivity". Many doctors now believe they are unsuitable to use in chronic pain.

As you can see it can be extremely difficult to find suitable painkillers and the main issue is side effects which can be severe plus the

danger of painkillers aggravating the pain in the long term in the case of opiates. It is not uncommon to find people who cannot tolerate any of these drugs. Also drugs are quite variable in their effect: they can be very effective in one person but not at all useful in another with a similar condition.

## Nutrients and Herbs

Some nutrients and herbs can help with pain relief.

**High dose Vitamin C.** This has both healing and pain-relieving qualities. Build up gradually from about 4 grams daily. Work up to bowel tolerance: this is when the bowels become a bit loose - usually at doses of between 6 and 20 grams daily, then the dose can be reduced slightly until the bowels become normal again. The powder is often the best form of Vitamin C to use for high dosage.

**MSM (methylsulfonylmethane)** This sulphur-containing supplement is found naturally in the body. It is also found in animals and plants. It has a slightly bitter taste. It helps 60-70% of people with pain. It is useful in muscular pain such as a whiplash injury. It comes in many forms including capsules, powder, crystals, gel and creams.

A starting dose is one gram (1000mg) three times daily increasing by one gram every few days until easing of symptoms. Typically it takes between two to four weeks to work. Long-standing pain will take longer and it may be necessary to increase the dose appreciably for severe pain. The usual dose is up to 8 grams daily but it has no toxic effects in animals at doses equivalent to 500 grams daily in humans. Some people need doses of 40 to 60 grams daily. Stop if you get nausea or loose stools. It has a slight blood-thinning effect so it should be avoided by those taking blood-thinning medication such as warfarin. Combining oral medication with a cream or gel adds to its effect. It can also improve energy, help nail and hair growth, reduce allergies and lead to a smoother skin.

**D L Phenylalanine (DLPA) or D Phenylalanine.** These are expensive but have useful painkilling qualities. Start at 1 gram daily and build up to 3 grams daily. Unusually for pain-relieving substances, when pain relief is achieved the dose can often be reduced and the pain relief will stay the same. Side-effects are rare.

Transdermal magnesium such as magnesium sprays can be good where areas of **muscle spasm**.

Capsaicin (derived from chilli peppers) helps with the pain of arthritis, sciatica and neuropathy. It seems to block a pain messenger called substance P. A cream containing this is available on prescription called Axsain.

Devils Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) contains anti-inflammatory and pain-killing chemicals. Controlled trials showed it helps in back pain and arthritis. It is taken as a tea (1 gram of dry root three times a day) or a tablet 300mg three times daily.

White willow bark reduces inflammatory prostaglandins. Controlled trials have shown it helps in arthritis and back pain. Pain intensity reduced from 6.4 to 3.7 at 4 weeks and 2.7 at 8 weeks with 97% having reduction of pain in one study. The normal dose is 400mg one to three times daily. Do not take with aspirin (which was made from this).

Boswellia is an Indian herb which reduces inflammation. Use 550mg three times daily.

**The right sort of fat can make a difference.** Generally **Omega 3 fats** which are found in oily fish (mackerels, sardines, herring, pilchards, wild salmon), some seeds (pumpkin, flaxseed) and some nuts (walnuts) **have anti-inflammatory properties**. However the body does need both Omega 3 and 6 fats (Omega 6 fats are found in most seeds and nuts and in cold-pressed sunflower or safflower oil). Hemp seed oil contains both. It is worth increasing the amount of Omega 3 fats in the diet or using foods high in these fats or using a supplement such as a fish oil capsules. However in the long-term the diet needs to be high in both (most people are deficient in both). It is also important to cut down on hydrogenated fats as these compete with essential fats. These can add to your problems. They are produced whenever fats are heated such as in frying and in making processed foods such as margarines and all supermarket oils (except olive oil). Look on labels for hydrogenated fat, also called trans fatty acid, vegetable oil, vegetable fat, shortening, hydrolysed fat, hydrolysed vegetable protein.

## Other methods

No method of pain relief will work for everyone but try some of these and see if they can help.

### Breathing Out Pain

This is a commonly used technique, typically used for childbirth. Breathing moves energy and can help reduce pain. Breathe in through the nose as if smelling a rose and out through the mouth as if blowing out a candle. As you do this, progressively slow the breathing. Then imagine breathing out the pain.

### Tapping

It is a natural instinct to touch and massage parts of the body that have pain and for good reason. Tapping is often useful for sore muscles – tap for a few minutes until you feel a loosening of any tension. A hairbrush with many bristles can be useful for tapping.

There are more complex methods which involve zonal tapping but these have to be done with specific charts.

### Massaging

This is good for tender, sore areas and muscles. Massage them for a few minutes each day and usually the tenderness and muscle spasm gets easier over time.

### Stretching

Stretch the area surrounding the pain about an inch or two away – this often relieves the congestion. Then press deeply around the edges of the pain.

## Pinching

Pinching very lightly over the area of pain can be like pushing a reset button for pain. Very lightly pinch with thumb and forefinger. This is a signal to release trapped energy.

## Siphoning

Do with another partner. The person easing the pain needs to place their left hand on the area of the other person's pain and put their right hand out, down and away from the body. This technique is often quite instinctive to many people. Be aware of the pain draining from the area of pain on the left hand to the right hand and then out. In the unlikely event of the pain getting stuck in the helper then they should stop, shake their hands and place their hands in cold running water.

## Abdominal pains

This is similar to the above. Put the left hand on the painful area and the right hand on the spinal area on the back immediately behind it – this will often ease pain.

## **Electromagnetic Therapies**

Several electromagnetic methods can help pain. TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) machines are the best known of these. The electrical stimulation can block pain. TENS machines help some people but are somewhat variable in their effectiveness.

## Acupuncture

Acupuncture has a good reputation for pain relief. In China operations are performed using only acupuncture. Be aware that some acupuncture practitioners are better and more experienced than others.

## Earthing

Clint Ober made the observation that positive electrical charge is neutralised when contact is made with the earth which has a negative charge. This is important because inflammation and pain are often associated with positive charge. Most footwear is made with plastic and rubber. This insulates the body from the ground so the body cannot release the positive charge. What will release this charge is when you have bare feet in contact with the grass or the earth. Even better is contact with the sea which is a very good conductor. You can test this by making contact with the earth with bare feet for 15-30 minutes and see if the pain eases. Ideally try it daily for several days. If it does help there are a number of devices available which can keep you "earthed".

## Food

Integrative GP, Dr Sarah Myhill has had considerable success treated chronically painful conditions such as neuralgia, fibromyalgia and arthritis using a **Paleolithic diet** (this is the diet of hunter-gatherers and omits "modern foods"); it is low in carbohydrates and high in fibre, fat, protein and fermented foods (see [www.drmyhill.co.uk](http://www.drmyhill.co.uk)). Some people with chronic headaches and neuralgia have also been cured on a gluten-free diet.

## Using the Mind

There are people who can sleep on beds of nails or put needles through their arms without pain and, more surprisingly, without even losing any blood. Pain can be relieved or reduced during and after hypnosis. How is this possible? It is possible because the mind is involved with pain and can modify it.

In a sense we have all done this. We have had a pain and then got caught up in something else and hardly noticed it. This is a natural phenomenon.

A simple method is to notice what the pain is like in your mind: note the shape, the colour, the size. The next step is to change each feature one by one. For instance you can make the size fill the room then shrink it way down in size – note which change helps and keep it like that. Often changing colours from reds to greens seems to help. All this takes a bit of practice but will be worth the effort. Sometimes sending it to another location helps, such as pushing it out to the sun to melt it.

You feel pain because nerves travel to the brain from the site of pain. Imagine putting an insulating device between the ends of these nerves – sense the electricity going up the nerve and fizzling out when it reaches the insulating material. Sense the charge cannot get across this area.

Another method is to feel the pain without resisting it. Focus completely on it. Then shift your consciousness to an awareness that you are not your body – you are just aware of your body and the pain –sense it from a distance. This is a subtle shift but can ease pain a lot.

Imagine a dial indicating the pain level. Slowly turn it down. Notice the pain. Turn it down again.

As you can see there are many methods that can be used and different methods work better for different people. An intriguing and quite simple to use method called Resolution Magic has been developed by Olivia Roberts. For years she suffered with severe debilitating migraines, spinal pain and irritable bowel. She obtained little relief from medications which she was largely intolerant to. In desperation she worked out a method that eventually relieved her pain. This involved working with her subconscious mind. This method is described in her book "Chronic pain and debilitating Conditions Resolution" and includes a CD which is used in the process.

## **Method of Michael Moskowitz**

Dr Michael Moskowitz runs a pain clinic in America. He was no stranger to pain. His femur which had been displaced and fractured in multiple places. He came close to needing an amputation. He had previously had many years of pain following a water-skiing injury to his neck. He found himself in an increasing spiral of pain where painkillers were having less and less effect.

He became interested in how the brain processes pain. He realised that areas in his brain which would normally process thoughts, sensations, emotions, memories and movement were being used for pain and this typically happens when pain becomes chronic. That's why it's difficult to tolerate sounds and light in some types of chronic pain. In other words parts of the brain are pirated to process pain. He had also heard about studies of brain plasticity where the brain function could relearn skills. He wondered if those areas of the brain that had been taken over for pain could be taken back for their original purpose and he could train his brain to remove the pain.

He developed a plan. It required great determination. He knew much of the brain is used for vision. So he imagined a map of his own brain and visualized the areas involved in pain (he knew these had increased). He saw this area shrink to what it was before the pain. He knew he had to be completely relentless, more relentless than the pain. Every single time he got pain he visualized the pain map in his brain shrinking. **In other words he forced his brain to use a visual image not a pain signal.** He never let pain go by without doing this visualization or some other mental activity.

It took time, but by 6 weeks the pain in his shoulders had gone and never came back. After 4 months he was having pain-free periods in his neck and in less than a year he was totally pain free. Decades of pain had finally gone.

He taught his technique to other patients (who had also suffered pain for long periods) and it worked. But it needed a lot of motivation in the early weeks. He told them they had to be more determined than the pain. It would be difficult as weeks could go before noticing a difference. It was far from an instant cure, the brain had to learn a new pattern, like learning a new skill. Feeling pain became the signal to push back focussing on rewiring the brain. But in the long term it worked and it was permanent unlike drugs which the body eventually becomes tolerant to.

I don't think this is an easy technique but it is free and given time it does work. I don't think it needs an exact visualization is critical (one idea might be to imagine areas that light up red in the brain going blue or a neutral colour or imagine turning down a dial for pain and see it shrinking) but what is important is training the brain to do something different and developing new pathways.