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**Alternative or Complementary Ways to Control Pain**

There are many ways to help manage pain. Medicine is one way, but other methods can be used along with medicine. Sometimes these other approaches may be used without medicine to control pain. Many can be used any place or any time. Some do not cost anything.

**Acupuncture.** Acupuncture is a procedure in which a licensed practitioner inserts needles into specific points on the skin. It has been shown to be effective in treating some forms of pain, such as headache, osteoarthritis of the knee, and chronic back pain. It appears to stimulate the release of chemicals that the body makes naturally for pain relief.

**Art and Music Therapies.** Sometimes art and music therapy can help control pain. Using art materials or music, you may:

* Learn more about your feelings.
* Find it easier to express your feelings.
* Feel better about yourself.
* Develop healthier ways to cope with problems.
* Find distraction from the pain.

**Biofeedback**. Biofeedback is a technique that helps you learn how to be more aware of your body's response to pain and how to cope with it. It helps you learn to control stress, tension, and anxiety. A machine monitors changes in your body, like your blood pressure and breathing rate. The machine tells you right away how well your relaxation exercise is working--for example, if your blood pressure and breathing rate are going down. This helps you learn how to relax better. It may be done at a healthcare provider's office or you can get machines to use at home. Biofeedback has been found to be helpful for migraine headaches and chronic body pain.

**Chiropractic/Osteopathic Manipulation**. Chiropractic involves adjustments of the joints of the spine, as well as other joints and muscles. It may ease pain in the back, neck, or joints. Sometimes it helps relieve the pain of headaches, muscle spasms, and inflamed nerves. Treatments should involve slow, gentle movements of the head, neck, and spine. Adjustments that are too rapid can cause injury. Osteopathic medicine involves movement of the joints combined with physical therapy and instruction in proper posture. Osteopathic manipulation of the spine may improve function and reduce back pain.

**Orthopedic Devices.** Several devices are available that may improve function and relieve pain. Examples of such devices are wraps, pressure stockings, splints, and neck collars.

**Distraction.** Focusing on something else can be a powerful way to temporarily relieve even the most intense pain. Try focusing on music, hobbies, social activities, TV, or talking to family or friends. This can work well while you are waiting for pain medicines to take effect. Listening to music during painful procedures can be helpful.

**Herbs and Supplements.** Some herbs and supplements may help reduce pain. Yerba mate tea has been found to decrease pain during chemotherapy. Valerian may reduce pain and promote rest and sleep. Feverfew might help prevent migraine headaches. Probiotics included in some brands of yogurt can reduce abdominal pain and bloating.

Herbs can interact with other medicines you may be taking. Talk with your provider or pharmacist before you use herbs and supplements to manage your pain. You want to make sure there are no possible harmful interactions with your regular medicines.

**Hypnosis.** Hypnosis puts you in a state of deep relaxation. While you are hypnotized, the hypnotist can suggest different ways to experience the pain. You can also use audio tapes for self-hypnosis at home. The tapes may be more effective after you have experienced hypnosis by a trained therapist. The therapist can suggest ways to use self-hypnosis at home.

**Massage**. Massage increases blood circulation and reduces tension. Massages can be given by a trained massage therapist or a caregiver. You can also buy massage tools or devices to add vibration or heat to a massage. Massage has been found to be helpful for various types of chronic body pain.

**Nutrition.** Foods can affect pain. Some foods may make headaches, joint pains, or digestive pains worse. It may help to keep a diary of the food you eat and your pain symptoms. The diary can help you see if foods affect your pattern of pain. Although, you may find that some foods make you feel worse, some may help you feel better.

Chronic pain can be associated with a low mood and depression. An effective way to help even out your mood is to eat a balanced diet of protein (lean meats, low fat dairy products, beans, nuts and seeds) and carbohydrates (whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables). Limit sugar, saturated fats, and alcohol. This type of diet, if eaten in regularly spaced meals throughout the day, can help keep your blood sugar at a steady level. It can also allow a steady level of endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemicals.

You may find that you feel better when you eat foods that contain omega-3 oils, such as salmon, flaxseeds and walnuts. Other foods that may help your mood and pain are low-fat and nonfat milk products, almonds, brazil nuts, dark chocolate (1 ounce a day), and dark leafy greens such as spinach. Coffee, in small amounts (about 1 cup) can improve mood, but a lot of coffee might make you feel worse.

Comfort foods have been used for years to ease pain and low mood. They are different for each person but usually are foods like mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, and ice cream. These foods are easily digested carbohydrates that turn to serotonin, a calming brain chemical. They can be soothing and fine in moderation, but they can lead to weight gain and guilt if you eat too much.

**Relaxation.** Relaxation reduces tension in the muscles. This helps keep pain from getting worse. Relaxation can give you more energy and make you less tired. It may reduce anxiety and allow other pain relief methods to work better. You may be able to fall asleep more easily. Examples of relaxation methods are deep breathing and progressive relaxation. Progressive relaxation involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. Yoga and meditation are other ways to relax.

**Therapeutic Exercise**. Range-of-motion exercises can improve function and lessen pain. Another kind of exercise is water therapy (hydrotherapy), using swimming pools, hot tubs, or whirlpools. Physical exercise programs such as qi gong or tai chi can also help control pain. Regular exercise is known to be an effective treatment for mild depression. (Depression can make pain worse.) Your healthcare provider or a physical therapist can prescribe an exercise program.

**Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS).** TENS may relieve pain by sending small electrical impulses to your nerves through electrodes placed on the skin. The electrical impulses block pain. Usually you wear a small, lightweight box at your waist. The box generates the electrical impulses. You may use the TENS unit for weeks or months.

**Visualization.** You can try seeing an image of the pain and then changing the image. For example, you might imagine the pain as a red-hot fire. You may then imagine the pain lessening as water puts out the fire. You can use audio tapes to learn this technique. Therapists can also help you learn this skill.

Many unproven remedies come from people who share misinformation and personal experiences with others. Products and devices can be useful for some purposes but worthless for others. Some remedies can be dangerous. Examples are coffee enemas for cancer, motor oil for arthritis, and iron supplements for energy. Always talk with your healthcare provider before taking any kind of supplements, changing your diet, or buying devices that might do more harm than good.

**Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**. Mindfulness is a program that teaches you to be more aware of the present moment. You focus only on what is happening right now and don't think about the past or the future. This can help you to notice negative thoughts and feelings and let them go. It increases your awareness of your immediate situation and environment and helps you appreciate the present. Practicing this focus on daily life has been found to be helpful for people with chronic pain.

**Magnetic Therapy**. Another area under study is magnetic therapy. Pulsating electromagnetic therapy has been used to help bone fractures heal. It has been claimed, but not proven, that it can be helpful for osteoarthritis, migraine headaches, multiple sclerosis, and sleep disorders. While it is not currently approved by FDA for use in pain, in time we may learn that it is helpful for some causes of chronic pain. Magnetic therapy should **not** be used if you have a medical device such as a pacemaker. The magnet may interfere with the device.

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