Ways to Reduce Your Pain Without Medications

By Richard C. Shinaman, M.D.

In the face of an ongoing effort for wise and judicious prescriptions to limit access to opioid containing pain relieving medications, a number of patients have recently been reported that recommend that doctors prescribe less or even no pain medication. Many patients find that despite years of pain relief from medications, their doctors are suggesting that they stop their medication or even refuse to prescribe it anymore. Primary care doctors in particular have become very reluctant to prescribe any pain medication to even long-term patients.

Many patients want to know what to do and how they can treat the pain conditions that they have in light of these new recommendations and restrictions. All too often, we have found that a patient is asked to reduce or stop the amount of medication they are taking, but the doctor does not have enough time to review alternative treatments that may replace the use of the pain medications that the patient relied upon in the past. The following are two of several options to alleviate pain without medications. I’ll highlight additional options in future Lamorinda Weekly issues. I hope that the information below can be helpful to patients looking for ways to reduce pain from any number of pain related conditions.

**Number One: Move Your Body**

When we hurt, we tend to move less. Over time moving less loads the contracted muscle and more pain. It is important to remember that we don’t have all the pain we need to have their swinging each day.

Several studies have shown that tai chi and swimming may be the best sort of activity for people with painful conditions, and have also shown that doing these exercises outside is very good for physical and mental health. It seems that human beings do better in many ways when we are outside in the natural world. To start a simple activity like going for a walk with some stretching outside can do quite a bit in regard to relieving pain. Certain conditions may limit your ability to walk longer distances, but if this is the case it is important to still use parts of the above ways in ways that you can manage.

Several local community centers have classes on “chair yoga” or other low impact activities. If you are able to do more than just sit, then high intensity training may be very good for your muscles, your heart, and your brain. Researchers have concluded that short periods of very intense exercise can ultimately result in better gains for people over the long term. There are several apps and books discussing this type of exercise.

**Number Two: Mindfulness Approaches**

Most of us that grew up in a busy locale such as the Bay Area got used to hearing “Don’t just sit there, do something!” Nevertheless, when I am trying to discuss alternative healing techniques with my patients I like to remind them of “Don’t just do something, sit there.”

We all need time out from our frantic and hectic world that surrounds us. Mindfulness exercises are usually one of the easiest, least expensive, and effective techniques for almost all modern medical conditions including stress, insomnia, and chronic pain. Many people have preconceptions about meditation or mindfulness training, but it is important to know that mindfulness training is not based on religion and there is no “perfect” way to do a.

My own research at Stanford University showed that what matters most is consistency of practice. Believe it or not, simply sitting and concentrating on the breath while not allowing oneself to be constantly distracted results in clear and long-lasting health benefits. Regular practice leads to better sleep, pain, better sleep, and fewer incidence of stress related events like heart attacks and strokes.

There are a large number of techniques to try and I have found that most people should try a few different types of techniques until they find one that appeals to them. There are a large number of books, audio recordings, and even smart phone apps that can be used to guide the way.

Breathwork is one technique that many people may find helpful if regularly sitting “feels boring” or if someone feels that they just cannot do it at all.

I often recommend incorporating mindfulness exercises into your daily routine. Mindfulness exercises are very good for your muscles, your heart, and your brain. Researchers have concluded that short periods of very intense exercise can ultimately result in better gains for people over the long term. There are several apps and books discussing this type of exercise.

**Disclaimer:** The opinions and statements above are the opinions of Richard Shinaman, M.D. and are not intended to diagnose or treat any patient or person with a medical condition. No person should determine what might be best for an individual without evaluating you and your personal medical history. Everyone is different. Using any or all of the techniques described is done so at your own risk. You should discuss starting or stopping any treatment with your own medical provider. Only you can conclude if all treatments are ultimately responsible for your own health.