

Pain Relief: Drug-Free Strategies

Chronic pain can interfere with all aspects of life. It can lead to insomnia, impaired physical activity, isolation and depression. The most common chronic pain conditions are arthritis, back of neck, joint and nerve pain, and migraine.

Fortunately, we now have several strategies for relieving chronic pain. They include:

Physical and occupational therapies can be great allies in fighting your pain. Physical therapists guide you through mild exercise routines that help improve your strength and mobility. Occupational therapists teach you how to perform everyday activities in ways that don't aggravate your pain.

Yoga and tai chi have been successful in reducing or controlling pain from many conditions, including backache, headache, arthritis and lingering injuries. Movements emphasize strengthening the back and core muscles.

Massage therapy is especially effective for reducing muscular backache and pain from surgeries and injuries, as it relieves stress and anxiety.

Mind-body techniques, such as breathing exercises, can help you manage your perception of pain. Regarding your pain in a calmer way can reduce anxiety that otherwise would increase pain.



PRACTICAL Habits for Chronic Pain

- Gentle cardio exercise can boost endorphin brain chemicals that help block pain signals.
- Protect your sleep quality (e.g., alcohol and stress aggravate sleep problems).
- Quit smoking, as it can cause circulation problems and worsen your pain.
- You can learn from a support group.
- Track your pain level and activities every day.
- A well-balanced diet is essential to feeling stronger.

Pain researchers see the best results when treatments are prescribed after a thorough evaluation of each individual, often using a combination of therapies that can lead to improving your day-to-day quality of life.

5 Cooking Tips You May Not Know



Bring some chef-inspired knowledge into your kitchen with these 5 culinary tips:

1 Use the right cutting board:

Choose a non-porous board made from resin, marble or glass for cutting meat, poultry and seafood. They are easier to clean, and bacteria from raw meat won't get trapped in the grooves. Porous wood boards absorb everything, so they are best for cutting bread, vegetables and fruit — not for raw meat.

2 Invest in good-quality knives:

You don't need many — just a chef's knife, paring knife and bread knife. And get a knife sharpener, too — sharp knives are key to making food prep easier. Avoid putting knives in the dishwasher; detergent is abrasive and damages the sharp edge.

3 Keep lemons handy:

If you're not getting the best flavor from a dish, try adding a sprinkle of salt and some acid — grated lemon or lime zest, a squeeze of citrus juice or a splash of vinegar can make a dish sing.

4 No more tears:

If chopping onions makes you cry, try chilling them in the freezer for 10 minutes before slicing. The cold reduces the amount of sulfenic acids released into the air by the onion, thus reducing tears. Or, use a pair of onion goggles to stop the fumes from reaching your eyes.

5 Buy and freeze:

Enjoy a bounty of your favorite fruits and vegetables when they are in season, and freeze them for winter. You'll save money, enjoy the variety and reap health benefits, too. Frozen vegetables and fruits have just as many vitamins and minerals as fresh versions.



Q: Vitamin D test?

A: Blood tests can measure your recent vitamin D levels from foods, supplements and sunlight exposure on your skin.

Routine testing is not usually necessary in adults at normal risk. But if you have factors that raise your risk for vitamin D deficiency, your health care provider may order testing to ensure you are getting enough.



Deficiency risks: Limited sun exposure is a common cause of low vitamin D. Older age or not regularly going outdoors often limits sun exposure. Other risks for D deficiency include dark skin, obesity and osteoporosis. Unhealthy diet or poor absorption of nutrients — as occurs in those with celiac disease or inflammatory bowel disease — can also make low vitamin D more likely. If in doubt, ask your provider if you need the test. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP



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