**Holistic Approaches to Chronic Pain**

**Mindfulness**

Presented by Erin Easton of New Leaf Mindfulness Coaching. Erin has her masters in the use of meditation and mindfulness in language acquisition. She is a certified life and health coach and yoga instuctor. Learn more at www.newleafmindfulness.com.

Chronic pain affects so much more than just our body. The limitations it imposes strain our relationships, work, hobbies, sports, spirituality, and finances and end up altering our perspective of self and the world. These shifts in our lives due to chronic pain can lead to depression, Alzheimer disease and related dementias, higher suicide risk, and substance use and misuse. (4) Our negative mental state can then heighten and prolong our physical pain. How much pain we feel is determined in significant part by our brains and minds, our current mood, our past experiences of pain, our psychology, and how serious we think our injury is. (1) A heightened emotional state during injury can prolong and strengthen pain responses and prolonged stress states reduce our ability to heal. So in order to heal the body, we have to heal the mind.

One of the largest causes of suffering in chronic pain is our mental battle with it. We are so angry at our body, we are angry at our situation, and we are angry at the world for not understanding and not being able to fix us. We are also very sad as we grieve the life we had or the life we wanted and the person we wanted to be. This mental battle with reality creates its own world of suffering. We now act in ways that push people away, that disconnect us from the things we loved, and isolate us in our own pain. In order to heal we have to pacify this mental storm.

Mindfulness has been described as a state of open mindedness in which one is aware of internal and external stimuli but does not react to them. (2,3) This takes us out of a mode of fighting, judging, solving, fixing, and manipulating back into a mode of being with our experience, in non-judgmental awareness. This non-judging observation of all mental formations generates mental health, cognition, and compassion which decreases the negative effect of difficult feelings and sensations.(2) By decreasing the fight with our experiences of pain we decrease our stress, anxiety, and depression and are better able to heal.

As our mind begins to calm we begin to change the way we relate to and interact with our pain. We listen more and learn what we really need. Instead of fighting to return to how life was we adapt in order to live well in the life we have. We discover how to generate positive emotions in new ways that are accessible to us. We build support systems that keep us on track and the positivity that we generate releases tension in our bodies allowing us to heal.

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**Guided Imagery**

Presented by Bri Lafferty of Brionic. Bri has her B.S. in Business Administration Certified Death Doula Certified in Ericksonian Hypnotherapy.

Guided imagery is a powerful and holistic technique that has been increasingly recognized for its effectiveness in chronic pain management. This therapeutic approach taps into the mind's incredible ability to influence the body, offering relief, relaxation, and improved overall well-being for individuals dealing with persistent pain.

Guided imagery involves the use of mental visualization and sensory imagination to create a peaceful, healing environment within the mind.

1. Altered Perception of Pain: Guided imagery can change the way the brain perceives pain signals.

2. Stress Reduction: Chronic pain often leads to heightened stress levels, which, in turn, exacerbate pain. Guided imagery induces a state of deep relaxation, calming the nervous system and reducing stress hormones like cortisol.

3. Enhanced Pain Coping Skills: Through guided imagery, individuals can develop a toolkit of coping strategies to manage pain effectively. They learn how to navigate and endure pain episodes with greater resilience, reducing the emotional suffering associated with chronic pain.

4. Improved Sleep:\*Chronic pain often interferes with sleep patterns. Guided imagery can aid in achieving better sleep by promoting relaxation and reducing the anxiety that can accompany pain. Restorative sleep is crucial for pain management and overall well-being.

5. Emotional Well-Being: Living with chronic pain can lead to feelings of frustration, depression, and anxiety. Guided imagery fosters a positive mental outlook, increasing feelings of hope and empowerment, which are essential for emotional well-being.

6. Mind-Body Connection: Guided imagery encourages individuals to reconnect with their bodies and gain a better understanding of their pain.

7. Reduced Medication Dependency: Many individuals with chronic pain rely on medication for relief, which can have side effects and risks. Guided imagery can complement medical treatment, potentially reducing the need for pain medication or allowing for lower doses.

8. Customized Approach: Guided imagery is highly adaptable and can be tailored to individual preferences and needs. It can be practiced in various formats, including one-on-one sessions with a therapist, group settings, or self-guided sessions using audio recordings or apps.

9. Long-Term Benefits: Unlike some interventions that offer only short-term relief, the skills acquired through guided imagery can have long-lasting benefits. Regular practice can lead to enduring improvements in pain management and overall quality of life.

10. Empowerment: Guided imagery empowers individuals to take an active role in their pain management. It gives them a sense of control and ownership over their well-being, reducing feelings of helplessness often associated with chronic pain.

Guided imagery is a valuable tool in the multifaceted approach to chronic pain management. By harnessing the mind's capacity to influence the body, it offers a non-invasive, drug-free means of alleviating pain, reducing stress, and improving overall quality of life for those who grapple with persistent discomfort.

**Acupunture and Zero Balancing**

Presented by James Damman of Acubalance. James Damman. James has a Master’s

degree in acupuncture, and as an adjunct to Classical Five Element Acupuncture, James also offers Zero

Balancing – a form of structural acupressure. He may be contacted through his website at

www.acubalance.info

Acupuncture has been used to help with pain relief and to improve one’s quality of life for centuries. It has

greatly impacted me and has instilled a desire to help others who may be struggling.

Within Five Element acupuncture, our goal is to promote individual healing. We improve the overall strength

and balance of the vital life force present in each of us and in doing so, we become active participants in our

own healing process.

By restoring access to its own resources, the body can resolve many chronic conditions, even chronic pain.

We begin with a comprehensive intake where we discuss any concerns and review health history. Topics can

include sleep and digestion as well as hobbies/activities that one enjoys. We do this to lay the foundation for

the healing journey. Knowing where we begin allows us to better track any changes. What people often notice

first is that their mood improves or maybe they sleep better or have less indigestion. These “side effects”

often occur as the main concern for care is steadily improving as well. With consistent care, the body

strengthens its own healing mechanisms.

Clients may notice improvements in other areas of wellbeing before seeing significant changes in their main

concerns. Response to care is as unique as the individual. Initially, weekly treatment is suggested.

Symptoms occur to get our attention. They have us look at areas of our life that we may have neglected.

They’re an opportunity to take better care of ourselves and learn what works and how we can grow. This is an

evolutionary process that often requires compassion, grace, and patience. The healing journey can be

fulfilling, and we tend to discover hidden blessings along the way.

When dealing with chronic pain, acupuncture is just one tool. Other tools may include western medicine

(medications and drugs), bodywork (massage, physical therapy, chiropractic etc), counseling, and healthy

living habits like eating well and appropriate movement.

Because chronic pain affects people on all levels: physical, mental, and emotional, it’s important to provide

support in each area. Acupuncture involves the insertion of hair thin needles to specific areas of the body. It is

a modality that addresses the concerns on multiple levels simultaneously.

An evidence review of acupuncture for chronic pain can be found here:

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK569984/

**Naturopathic Medicine**

Presented by Shayna Keller of West Elks Wellness. Shayna L. Keller is a registered naturopathic doctor graduated from Bastyr University and Western Colorado University. You can reach her at 970.315.2086.

Chronic pain pulls at our psyche, asking our mind to choke down the pain to function. Even a

4/10 pain can nag at the soul. Pain is created in the body by stagnation and lack of blood flow at

the simplest terms. There may be a diagnosis that is the “cause” of the pain and dysfunction, but

often places that hurt, hurt because they are an old injury.

When a patient comes to me dealing with chronic pain, I like to ask the question – how are your

bowel movements, how frequently are you emptying your bladder and how often do you sweat?

Approaching chronic pain from the perspective of – is the body able to properly eliminate waste.

If the answer to any of those three questions isn’t within a functional range, we have some work

to do. The thought is if the body is detoxing via the kidneys (urine) and the liver/colon (stool)

that the body is ‘taking out the trash’ and thus reducing recirculation of harmful waste material

that the body makes (and we may unintentionally take in). However, when one or more of these

organs of elimination are not working properly, the body is having to work overtime to reprocess

waste products, especially via the liver. If we aren’t getting adequate water and proper mineral

intake, then the kidneys (and so will the brain, heart, skin, really every organ will need to work

harder) will have to work harder to create urine.

I consider the body from the perspective that it wants to be healthy, which looks slightly different

for everyone, and is doing the best it can with what it has. I approach chronic pain as a

restorative physiologist – give the body what it needs, help the body take out the trash and get

out of the way.

Lastly, the microbiota aka ‘the gut’ can regulate the pain response via modulating inflammation.

Having used antibiotics even for appropriate reasons can contribute to dysbiosis of the

microbiota and thus lead a person to experience more or new chronic pain. By working on the

gut, the lining of the intestines can begin to heal thereby reducing the neurological sensation of

pain.

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registered naturopathic doctor at West Elks Wellness 970.315.2086

**M.D.**

Presented by Dr. Melinda Marzolf who is a board-certified Osteopathic Family Medicine Physician and works with Peak Family Medicine. Her undergraduate degree is in Biochemistry from Susquehanna University and her

medical doctorate is from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. In addition, she has

completed an undergraduate fellowship in Osteopathic Manipulation. She completed her family

medicine residency in Beaver, Pennsylvania. She is currently completing requirements for a Lifestyle

Medicine Board Certification.

With traditional medicine in primary care, it is finding the origin and mechanism that contributed to the

pain and finding the best treatment plan for that specific patient. I look at multiple causes of pain. Is this

chronic pain originating from the musculoskeletal system, visceral or an organ system, is it neuropathic

in nature. I will also look at how much it is affecting the patient mentally and their function. Typically,

history will help determine and physical exam will help to support the diagnosis.

If visceral pain, it is finding the underlying cause and treating that condition. Do we need a surgeon or

medication, is it curable or do we need to manage the pain chronically?

If musculoskeletal pain, I will start with medications to help with inflammation or neural pain receptors.

Our plan may also include supplementing with musculoskeletal medicine with osteopathic or

chiropractic manipulation. I will often refer to physical therapy to help with pain management,

treatment of the underlying condition and strengthening to help prevent further injury.

In neuropathic pain, it may be a medical condition like a nutritional deficiency or from nerve injury.

Again, will treat the nutritional deficiency and manage the pain with medications specifically to treat

nerve pain like gabapentin, duloxetine (Cymbalta).

In chronic pain, there are a lot of neurologic pathways that affect the same neurotransmitters in the

brain that affect mood. Pain affects sleep which affects mood. Our threshold and perception of pain will

also change. For example, opiate medications at higher doses will lower pain threshold and make pain

worse. I will consider medications, biofeedback, acupuncture, massage, meditation/mindfullness and

counseling along with other modalities.

Lastly, I focus on diet and exercise, the Western Diet is pro-inflammatory and so making dietary changes

is also going to help manage pain. I will also review supplements that may be helpful.

As a primary care physician, I make diagnoses and then refer to others while also looking at diet, meds,

and exercises that I can provide and referring to qualified providers. The goal is to find a treatment plan

that will best match the patient’s condition but most importantly their goals and values.