

Coping With Chronic Pain

Natural remedies that can help

Do you experience pain that just won't quit? For some people, it's an annoying ache located around the shoulder blades or in the lower back. Others deal with gnawing arthritis in their hips, knees, and fingers. We turned to pain expert Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, medical director of the Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers and author of *Pain Free 1-2-3* for help.

Taste for Life: Back pain is a common problem. Why is this type of pain so prevalent? Should we expect to live with a certain amount of pain as we age, due to the normal wear and tear of being human?

Jacob Teitelbaum: Back pain is common for several reasons, including our being an upright species. Most back pain is simply muscle pain caused by tight muscles. When the muscles release, even if they have been tight for decades, the pain goes away.

Unfortunately, most physicians are clueless about pain management, including back pain. To make matters worse, they often don't recognize that they are not trained in pain management, and disrespect others, such as chiropractors, who are. They prescribe toxic arthritis medicines, recommend surgery, or tell people they just need to live with the pain. But you don't!

I have treated thousands of people with severe chronic pain and can count on my fingers how many I have not been able to make comfortable. Chronic pain is not something you should expect to live with—and it is not acceptable.

TFL: For the person choosing natural remedies to alleviate chronic pain, whether it be the joints or the back, are there any pain-killing/inflammation-reducing herbs you recommend?

JT: Many natural remedies are more effective than prescription meds—and much safer and less expensive. I recommend looking for a supplement that includes ingredients such as the antioxidant curcumin, the herb boswellia, the essential amino acid DLPA, and the enzyme nattokinase (which is extracted from fermented soybeans).

For arthritis, an effective herbal pain mix would include boswellia (also known as frankincense), willow bark (the original source of aspirin, which when used as a whole herb is safer), and cherry fruit. The willow bark component alone has been shown to be twice as effective as medications for back pain and more effective than arthritis medicine. These herbs may be taken along with pain medications, but you should always consult your healthcare practitioner before making any changes to your regime.

In addition, there are different recipes for different types of pain. For example, B vitamins, magnesium, lipoic acid, and acetyl L-carnitine are helpful for nerve pain. Vitamin B6 (at 400 milligrams a day) decreases migraine frequency by 69 percent after six weeks. My recommendations for how to treat each type of pain can be found under Health A-Z at www.vitality101.com.

TFL: What is the role of omega-3 essential fatty acids in alleviating chronic pain?

JT: Omega-3 fish oils calm inflammation in our bodies. A key reason for the increased pain of modern life is that decreased fish oil and omega 3s in our diets can leave us in inflammatory overdrive. Eating several portions of cold-water fish such as salmon or tuna weekly can be extremely helpful in decreasing pain. If taking a supplement, use a brand with very high absorption.

TFL: Do enzymes play any role in pain management?

JT: Yes. For acute injury, like a sprained ankle, enzymes taken between meals can be helpful. The enzymes help reduce the inflammation, allowing healing to occur.

TFL: Are there vitamin and mineral deficiencies that could be playing a role in chronic pain?

JT: Nutritional deficiencies play a major role in chronic pain. A muscle is like a spring, which takes more energy to stretch than to contract. Decreased energy production in a muscle causes it to become locked in a shortened position, which hurts. Especially important are magnesium and B vitamins. Magnesium is our body's natural muscle relaxant, and more than half of food's natural magnesium is lost in processing.

TFL: Any other thoughts on pain?

JT: Pain is not an enemy but rather, like the oil light on our car's dashboard, an important signal telling us that something needs attention. When our hand is on a hot stove, the cause is obvious. But when there is a metabolic problem, the cause is less obvious. When you hear what pain is telling you and treat it, the pain goes away! TFL

Check It Out!

Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, has created a free iPhone app called Cures A-Z that covers numerous conditions and their treatments. Backed by thousands of research studies, this is a science-based health resource.