



How to Alleviate Your Pain

For some people, pain can be relieved without using medicine. They use relaxation, imagery, distraction, and skin stimulation. You may need the help of health professionals to learn to do these for yourself. Friends or family members can help with some of them. The techniques are also useful along with pain medicines.

Steps

1 Relax. Relaxation relieves pain or keeps it from getting worse by reducing tension in the muscles. It can help you fall asleep, give you more energy, make you less tired, reduce your anxiety, and make other pain relief methods work better. Some people, for instance, find that taking a pain medicine or using a cold or hot pack works faster and better when they relax at the same time.

- Open your eyes and stare at an object, or close your eyes and think of a peaceful, calm scene. With the palm of your hand, massage near the area of pain in a circular, firm manner. Avoid red, raw, swollen, or tender areas. You may wish to ask a family member or friend to do this for you.
- Once you are breathing slowly and comfortably, you may relax different body parts, starting with your feet and working up to your head. Think of words such as limp, heavy, light, warm, or floating. Each time you breathe out, you can focus on a particular area of the body and feel it relaxing. Try to imagine that the tension is draining from that area. For example, as you breathe out, feel your feet and ankles relaxing; the next time you breathe out, feel your calves and knees relaxing, and so on up your body

2 Use Imagery. Usually, imagery for pain relief is done with the eyes closed. A relaxation technique may be used first. The image can be something such as a ball of healing energy or a picture drawn in your mind of yourself as a person without pain (for example, imagine that you are cutting wires that transmit pain signals from each part of your body to your brain).

- Imagine a ball of healing energy forming in your lungs or on your chest. It may be like a white light. It can be vague. It does not have to be vivid. Imagine this ball forming, taking shape. When you are ready, imagine that the air you breathe in blows this healing ball of energy to the area of your pain. Once there, the ball heals and relaxes you. When you breathe out, imagine the air blows the ball away from your body. As it goes, the ball takes your pain with it.

3 Get some Distraction. Distraction means turning your attention to something other than the pain. Many people use this method without realizing it when they watch television or listen to the radio to “take their minds off” the pain. Distraction may work better than medicine if pain is sudden and intense or if it is brief, lasting only 5 to 45 minutes. Distraction is useful when you are waiting for pain medicine to start working. If pain is mild, you may be able to distract yourself for hours. Some people think that a person who can be distracted from pain does not have severe pain. This is not necessarily true. Distraction can be a powerful way of temporarily relieving even the most intense pain.

4 Use Skin Stimulation. Skin stimulation is the use of pressure, friction, temperature change, or chemical substances to excite the nerve endings in the skin. Scientists believe that the same nerve pathways transmit the sensations of pain, heat, cold, and pressure to the brain. When the skin is stimulated so that pressure, warmth, or cold is felt, pain sensation is lessened or blocked. Skin stimulation also alters the flow of blood to the affected area. Sometimes skin stimulation will get rid of the pain, or the pain will be less during the stimulation and for hours after it is finished.

- Skin stimulation is done either on or near the area of pain. You also can use skin stimulation on the side of the body opposite to the pain. For example, you might stimulate the left knee to decrease pain in the right knee. Stimulating the skin in areas away from the pain can be used to increase relaxation and may relieve pain.
- For pain relief, massage is most effective when using slow, steady, circular motions. You can massage over or

near the area of pain with just your bare hand or with any substance that feels good such as talcum powder, warm oil, or hand lotion. Depending upon where your pain is located, you may do it yourself or ask a family member or friend to give you a massage. Remember, having someone give you a foot rub, back rub, or hand rub can be very relaxing and may relieve pain. Some people find brushing or stroking lightly more comforting than deep massage. Use whatever works best for you.

Tips

- Relaxation may be done sitting up or lying down. Choose a quiet place whenever possible. Close your eyes. Do not cross your arms and legs because that may cut off circulation and cause numbness or tingling. If you are lying down, be sure you are comfortable. Put a small pillow under your neck and under your knees or use a low stool to support your lower legs.
- Hot and cold for relieving pain; heat often relieves sore muscles; cold lessens pain sensations by numbing the affected area.
- Drinking alcohol sometimes can provide pain relief, increase appetite, reduce anxiety, and help you sleep. Drinking small amounts of alcoholic beverages with meals or in the evening may be beneficial for you. Ask your doctor's advice before you start using alcohol, because it is dangerous to combine alcohol with certain pain-relieving drugs.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to recommend commercially available relaxation tapes. These tape recordings provide step-by-step instructions in relaxation techniques.

Warnings

- Do not use heat over a new injury because heat can increase bleeding. Wait at least 24 hours.
- If you are having radiation therapy, avoid massage in the treatment area.
- Be very careful while using a heating pad if you are taking drugs or medicines that make you sleepy or if you do not have much feeling in the area.
- If skin stimulation increases your pain, stop using it.
- Do not use cold so intense or for so long that the cold itself causes pain.

Sources and Citations

- http://www.hospicenet.org/html/without_meds.html