



Education

Alternative or Complementary Ways to Control Pain

There are many ways to help manage pain. Medicine is one way, but other methods can be used along with medicine. Sometimes these other approaches may be used without medicine to control pain. Many can be used any place or any time. Some do not cost anything.

Acupuncture. Acupuncture has been proven to help treat pain, both chronic and acute. It appears to stimulate the release of chemicals that the body makes naturally for pain relief.

Art and Music Therapies. Sometimes art and music therapy can help control pain. Using art materials or music, you may:

- Learn more about your feelings.
- Find it easier to express your feelings.
- Feel better about yourself.
- Develop healthier ways to cope with problems.
- Find distraction from the pain.

Biofeedback. Biofeedback equipment can help you learn to control some body functions such as heart rate and muscle tension. It can help with tension and anxiety.

Chiropractic. Chiropractic may ease pain in the back, neck, or joints. Sometimes it helps relieve the pain of headaches, muscle spasms, and inflamed nerves. Treatments should involve slow, gentle movements of the head, neck, and spine. Adjustments that are too rapid can cause injury.

Orthopedic Devices. Several devices are available that may improve function and relieve pain. Examples of such devices are wraps, pressure stockings, splints, and neck collars.

Distraction. Focusing on something else can be a powerful way to temporarily relieve even the most intense pain. Try focusing on music, hobbies, social activities, TV, or talking to family or friends. This can work well while you are waiting for pain medicines to take effect. Listening to music during painful procedures can be helpful.

Herbs and Supplements. Some herbs and supplements may help reduce pain. Yerba mate tea has been found to decrease pain during chemotherapy. Valerian may reduce pain and promote rest and sleep. Feverfew might help prevent migraine headaches. Zinc and vitamin C may help wounds heal faster. Herbs can interact with other medicines you may be taking. Talk with your provider or pharmacist before you use herbs and supplements to manage your pain.

Hypnosis. Hypnosis puts you in a state of deep relaxation. While you are hypnotized, the hypnotist can suggest different ways to experience the pain. You can also get audio tapes for self-hypnosis to use at home. These may be more helpful after you have experienced hypnosis by a trained therapist. The therapist can suggest ways to use self-hypnosis at home.

Massage Therapy. Massage increases blood circulation and relieves tension. Massages can be given by a trained massage therapist or a caregiver. You can buy devices to add vibration or heat to a massage.

Nutrition. Foods can affect pain. Some foods may make headaches, joint pains, or digestive pains worse. It may help to keep a diary of the food you eat and your pain symptoms. The diary can help you see if some foods affect your pattern of pain.

Relaxation. Relaxation reduces tension in the muscles. This helps keep pain from getting worse. Relaxation can give you more energy and make you less tired. It may reduce anxiety and allow other pain relief methods to work

better. You may be able to fall asleep more easily. Examples of relaxation methods are deep breathing and progressive relaxation. Progressive relaxation involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. Yoga and meditation are other ways to relax.

Therapeutic Exercise. Range-of-motion exercises can improve function and lessen pain. Another kind of exercise is water therapy (hydrotherapy), using swimming pools, hot tubs, or whirlpools. Physical exercise programs such as qi gong or tai chi can also help control pain. Your health care provider or a physical therapist can prescribe an exercise program.

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS). TENS may relieve pain by sending small electrical impulses to your nerves through electrodes placed on the skin. The electrical impulses block pain.

Visualization. You can try seeing an image of the pain and then changing the image. For example, you might imagine the pain as a red-hot fire. You may then imagine the pain lessening as water puts out the fire. You can get audio tapes to learn this technique. Therapists can also help you learn this skill.

Many unproven remedies come from people who share misinformation and personal experiences with others. Products and devices can be useful for some purposes but worthless for others. Some remedies can be dangerous. Examples are coffee enemas for cancer, motor oil for arthritis, and iron supplements for energy. Always talk with your health care provider before taking any kind of supplements, changing your diet, or buying devices that might do more harm than good.

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