

Ease Chronic Pain: Just Say “Om”

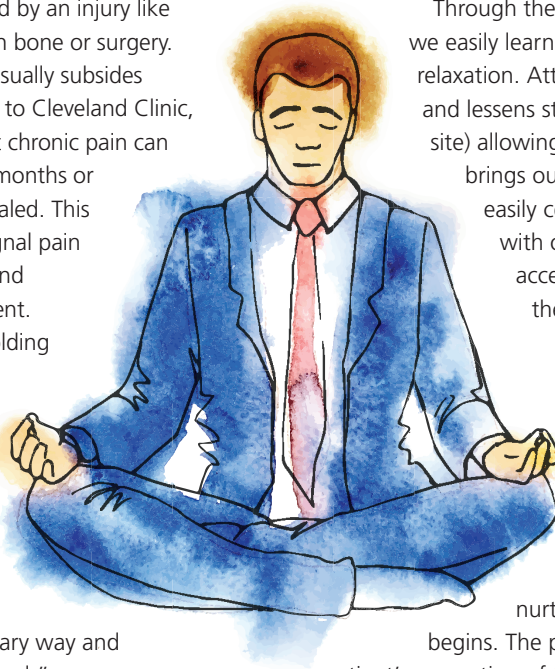
By Lorraine Alexander

If you think chronic pain is rare, think again. According to a report from the Institute of Medicine, more than 100 million Americans suffer from chronic pain at the cost of about \$600 billion a year. Chronic pain is near epidemic proportion across the U.S.

Acute pain vs. chronic pain

The onset of acute pain is sudden, caused by an injury like a burn or cut, a dental problem, a broken bone or surgery. When the affected area heals, the pain usually subsides within a six-month timeframe, according to Cleveland Clinic, a nonprofit academic medical center. But chronic pain can continue to plague sufferers; lasting for months or even years after the affected area has healed. This occurs because the body continues to signal pain to the nervous system. The pain is real, and the effect stresses the body and the patient. Chronic pain can immobilize patients, holding their life hostage by keeping them from their work, their daily activities and even their social life.

“We see that for many patients chronic pain becomes a disease in its own right,” according to Phillip Pizzo, M.D., of Stanford University School of Medicine. “We need to address this in a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary way and include prevention as a very important goal.”



Breathe deeply

It all begins with the breath; it's the source and vitality of life itself. Some know it as prana, or qi (pronounced *chi*). Without it, we cease to exist. But most individuals don't put much thought into the importance of the breath, or the way we breathe. We simply take it for granted.

Through the mind-body connection of meditation, we easily learn to use the breath to attain deep states of relaxation. Attaining this deep relaxation releases stress and lessens stagnant tension held in the body (or injury site) allowing our muscles to relax and soften. Meditation brings our attention back to “self,” allowing us to easily center ourselves. Daily practice reconnects us with our body in the healthiest way; we learn to accept the present fully and have confidence that the road ahead is friendly.

Meditation helps us to hit the “reset” button; allowing us to recapture the same level of happiness (or perceived quality of life) that we experienced before the injury—even though the injury and (or) pain may still remain. Meditation cultivates self-awareness; and as a patient turns attention towards

nurturing the mind, body, and spirit, healing begins. The pain may lessen, or it may not, but the patient's perception of their pain is forever changed.

Manage pain with meditation

Studies now suggest that meditation can reduce pain in a number of ways. Meditation can redirect attention away from the pain. It can reduce the anxiety and stress associated with the anticipation of pain. Meditation increases the production of endorphins, which lessens the pain signals to the brain, according to The National Center for Biotechnology Information.

But for those suffering from chronic pain, the benefits of meditation expand beyond pain management. The regular practice of meditation can curb impulses associated with addiction, and lessen the chance for dependency on prescription drugs or alcohol. Meditation brings a sense of calm to patients, offering a posture of acceptance and optimism.

Stress and inflammation

We swim in a sea of daily stress. We endure it; we shake it off and accept it as a part of our lifestyle. But if you suffer from chronic pain, pay close attention to your level of stress. Research indicates that inflammation associated with pain can be triggered by stress. The mind-body benefits of meditation can reduce stress and dampen the flare of inflammation.

A new standard of healing

The world of medicine has advanced toward a new successful model of healing chronic pain. Now patients with chronic pain are treated holistically through comprehensive wellness programs; these programs are proven to be successful. This multi-disciplinary treatment method embraces counseling sessions, nutritional coaching, physical therapy, yoga, and last but not least, a daily dose of sage wisdom—meditation.

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DASA meditation prioritizes education to enhance health, wellness and self-awareness. To learn more about meditation, upcoming lectures, local programs or business programs, go to www.DASAm meditation.org



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