

Conversations for Caring: 10 Caring Points

Topic: ***Non-Pharmacological Responses to Pain***

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1. Suffering is an emotional response to pain and its consequences. Pain-related suffering can be affected – either intensified or eased - by emotional, social, physical, and spiritual factors.
2. Evidence indicates that there are non-drug responses that can reduce the suffering caused by pain, particularly chronic pain. These methods generally involve 1) Educating people to understand and relate to their pain in new ways, 2) Skills training which replaces ineffective ways of approaching everyday activities that can cause or exacerbate pain, and 3) Proactive problem solving that equips people to better manage their pain.
3. For non-drug responses to pain to work best, it is important to be proactive rather than reactive. Reactive responses include waiting too long to address one’s pain, and then struggling to catch up with the pain. Being proactive involves being attentive to the early warning signs of pain and taking appropriate steps to manage the pain before the pain gets out of control.
4. Stress can intensify the perception of pain, and relaxation is an antidote to stress. Relaxation decreases emotional and physical arousal; lessens muscle tension and pain perception; improves control over the body and pain, enhances attention, and promotes “deep rest.”
5. Our very breathing can be a source of relaxation. Like the waves of the ocean, our breaths move in a deep rhythm – in and out, over and over again. Mindful breathing involves watching our breaths – not seeking to control them, just watching. And when the thoughts of our busy minds distract us, we can gently return to watching the breath without judgment.
6. Proper body mechanics prevents injury, decreases pain, reduces stress on muscles and joints, increases activity capacity, and conserves energy. Proper body mechanics always involve maintaining the normal spinal curves (*See graphic on reverse side.*). Other helpful activity reminders include: Use a wide stance of support with feet not too close together, bend at the hips and the knees and not the back, keep objects close, turn don’t twist, push rather than pull, and engage the abdominal (core) muscles to support the lower back.
7. Pacing teaches people to break activities into smaller, more manageable steps, rather than using an all-or-nothing approach. Overwhelming questions such as “Can I do this activity?” can be replaced with “How can I do this activity in stages, without increasing my pain?” Pacing reduces fatigue and feelings of frustration and helps people achieve their goals and feel a sense of accomplishment. Prioritizing, planning, balancing work and rest, and asking for help are all part of pacing.
8. Heat and Cold Applications are examples of pain management techniques that people can use on their own. For best results, such techniques should be used proactively, before pain begins to increase, and consistently, several scheduled times each day. Caution should always be used when applying heat or cold, and the choice of heat or cold would depend upon the pain being treated, personal preference, and other factors.
9. Adapted T’ai Chi is a form of gentle movement that promotes relaxation and balance; increases standing tolerance, arm range of motion, and weight shifting; and decreases muscle guarding.
10. Self-management invites people with chronic pain to become more knowledgeable about their conditions, participate in decision making concerning their care, and ultimately manage their own care. Self-management, as opposed to the traditional medical model, helps people with chronic pain feel empowered to manage their own health conditions.

These 10 Caring Points are intended to be a summary of best practices.

*For citations, references, and additional information,
please contact Dan Collier at 781-586-8620 or dcollier@glss.net*

The Curves of the Spine



Compare Normal Spinal Curves with Those of Typical Computer Work Posture

Some Additional Resources

Area Resource:

- ***Pain and Functional Restoration Program***, Spaulding Outpatient Center Medford
101 Main Street, Suite 101, Medford, MA, 02155
Phone: 781-391-7518
Website: <http://pmr.hms.harvard.edu/pages/44/104/>

Books:

- ***Chronic Pain Control Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Coping with and Overcoming Pain***, (Ellen Mohr Catalano and Kimeron N. Hardin). Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 1997.
- ***Managing Pain Before It Manages You***, (Margaret Caudill). New York: Guilford Press, 2002.
- ***Pain Relief without Drugs: A Self-Help Guide for Chronic Pain & Trauma***, (Jan Sadler). Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 2007.

Websites:

- ***National Headache Foundation:*** www.headaches.org
- ***Arthritis Foundation:*** www.arthritis.org
- ***Alternative Medicine:*** www.alternativemedicine.com
- ***American Pain Society:*** www.americanpainsociety.org

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