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Reducing Stress and Pain in Troubled Times

Health Professionals Differ in Approach, But All Agree—Relaxation is Key to Managing Pain

Following the Sept 11 attacks, *Washington Post* reporter, Avram Goldstein heard that **pain** complaints were up and polled a number of **pain** facilities. In his October 1st story, "Terrorism Tied to Jump in **Pain** Problems," he wrote, "Tens of thousands of people whose chronic physical **pain** is usually kept in check have suffered setbacks since the terrorists attacks....Those who regularly treat **pain** say...they have been inundated with complaints of worsening **pain** from patients who suffer from cancer, back problems, arthritis, diabetic neuropathy, chronic headaches and other ailments."

The **American Pain Foundation** followed up on Goldstein's story and spoke with **pain** professionals around the country. The majority said they while they had not noticed an actual rise in **pain** complaints, all agreed that stress levels were up significantly—and that could lead to **pain**. Many of these professionals said it's an important time for *all* of us to take extra measures to reduce stress, and this should start with the basics—eating healthful foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

Some Expert Advice

What are some measures we can take to relax? There are a number of conventional and complementary therapies and techniques that can be used alone or in combination to reduce stress and relieve **pain**. Some require the assistance of a practitioner, while others can be self-administered. APF asked a variety of health practitioners to describe stress and **pain** from their perspectives, and offer readers some useful advice. Here's what they said.

Matthew Loscalzo, MSW, Director of Patient & Family Services, Co-Director of the Center for Cancer Pain Research at the Johns Hopkins Cancer Center

Trained as a social worker, Matthew Loscalzo's work is dedicated to helping cancer patients manage their **pain**. According to Loscalzo, "Stress will always make **pain** worse and it takes away valuable energy. People with stress and **pain** must think of energy as *gold*, and they must invest their energy wisely—in ways that will pay off. When energy is put into stress, the quality of life cannot be good."

"When talking about stress and **pain**," Loscalzo suggests, "We should use the *rule of parsimony*—that is, use the least effort to get the most benefit. Life shouldn't be focused on stress or **pain** management, it should be focused on life—on making connections with friends and family. There's excellent data to



show that those who are integrated into their social environment are healthier, live longer, and have more meaningful lives."

Loscalzo says that the best way to deal with stress and **pain** is through an integrated, team approach. "We should use any and all resources available and benefit from everything we know, and that includes drawing on both Western and Eastern traditions. Once we define the problem, a number of tools—biofeedback, hypnosis, meditation, relaxation, cognitive therapy, psychotherapy, and medicines—can all be brought into play."

"As healthcare professionals, we also need to teach people how to communicate more effectively—how to express what they're thinking and feeling. Sometimes that alone will relieve stress, " says Loscalzo.

He advises:

- Get informed. Make sure you get all the information you want and need from your healthcare professionals.
- Learn to problem-solve—it's the best hedge against **pain** and stress.
- Discuss your problems with others, brainstorm ideas and learn. When you try to figure out everything on your own, you can't do it as well.
- Develop a plan of action. Once you have a plan, you can cope with almost anything. Without a plan, there's an emotional vacuum, and that's easily filled with fear and terror.

Rick Marinelli, N.D., M.Ac., M.Ac.O.M., Naturopathic Physician and Acupuncturist

Rick Marinelli is a licensed, Oregon-based, naturopathic physician and acupuncturist who serves as the primary care physician for people with a variety of illnesses. Many of his patients have **pain** from orthopedic problems, injuries, degenerative diseases, inflammatory diseases, and cancer. Marinelli describes his practice as holistic. "We respect and utilize a lot of conventional medicines and technologies, but apply them differently. Herbal and homeopathic medicines, psychotherapy, counseling, acupuncture, and diet therapy, are among the treatments we use."

Marinelli believes that since Sept. 11, people are probably experiencing greater degrees of **pain**. "It's a psychological response to adverse events. People get into a thought pattern that bad things are happening *now*, when in truth, they're not. When we keep our minds in a worried state, we are essentially in a state of alarm and will experience **pain** to a greater degree. A recognition that our thought processes are coupled with our **pain** is an important insight. Trusting in life—in a higher power, and having faith that things will be okay, can have a remarkable effect."

Marinelli says there are a few things we can do on a daily basis to manage stress and **pain**:

- Pray. Faith in a higher power means you don't have to worry. Realize that you don't have the power to change things, and worrying doesn't help. Studies have shown a lot of people get significant **pain** relief from prayer.
- Meditate. Stop right now in the moment and appreciate living. Disengage from the thought process that is causing the alarm response in the body. If you are mindful in the moment—not what's happening in Afghanistan or problems with friends—your **pain** will be less. Consciously focus on your breath. Breath in and out, and think, 'I'm alive and well.' It seems so simple—and it is. It's good for alleviating psychic and physical **pain**.

- Exercise. Stress hormones associated with **pain** and fear are decreased with almost any kind of exercise. You can even combine meditation with physical exercise. Take time out of work to stand up, breath, pray or meditate. These are very tangible and effective strategies for reducing tension. It seems easy—but you are actually doing *something*.
- Reconnect with friends, family, and co-workers. Address fractured relationships. Apologizing has remarkable effects.

Scott Denny, DC, LAC, Chiropractor and Acupuncturist, President of the American Academy of Pain Management

Scott Denny practices both chiropractic and acupuncture in New York City. According to **Denny**, "The traditional definition of chiropractic is: the philosophy, science, and art of things natural—a system of adjusting segments of the spine for the removal of nerve interference. "Today, he says, the definition is much broader, and can includes therapies such aslifestyle counseling, nutrition, radiology, more traditional medical examining, among others.

"Many of the principles of chiropractic and similar to those of oriental and Ayurvedic medicine. Chiropractic is holistic and vitalistic.It's about wellness and wholeness. The body functions as a unit and has the ability to take care of itself. It is intelligent on its own and can repair things when properly guided. "

Denny says that since September 11, he has seen heightened levels of stress. "Many of my patients are experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They are nervous and agitated. They are not sleeping well, and they are having nightmares. These are stress producers, and stress affects the body in an emotional way that can translate into **pain**. Lately, I've been talking more with patients—letting them get out their anger and sharing in their anger. This has been helpful."

In terms of treatments that are beneficial for **pain** and stress, **Denny** says, "No one treatment can address all issues," **Denny** says. "You can't expect that an adjustment or a massage, for example, will fix everything. For **pain**, we encourage people to become familiar with multidisciplinary care. If you go to anyone who says he or she has all the answers, run."

Some tips:

- Take a hot tub to loosen up
- Place a cervical roll (a rolled up towel) behind the neck. This gives stretch and traction to the neck and relieves muscle tension. It's also a good remedy for insomnia.
- Place a rolled towel or pillow between your legs when you're lying down and sleeping on your side.
- Consider taking herbs such as valerian roots, chamomile tea, and passion flower to help you relax
- Stretch your neck and back regularly.
- Have a massage.

Barbara Kornblau, JD, OTL, FAOTA, DAAPM, Occupational Therapist and Attorney, President of the American Occupational Therapy Association

As an occupational therapist, Barbara Kornblau's job is to enable safe, **pain**-free performance of everyday tasks by looking at the person, the task, and the environment, and then making matches or changes to those three factors.

"The term *occupation*," she says, "refers to tasks and activities in peoples' lives that are meaningful and purposeful."

Kornblau says that, for many Americans, life has become increasingly more stressful. "For years, we've had very little leisure. We have cell phones, beepers, and emails—we're working almost 24 hours a day. We need to put boundaries around our lives."

Since September 11, Kornblau says, "More people seem to be getting sick. I'm seeing more asthma and arthritis pains. I'm also noticing that people are looking for—and going back to— things that give them comfort such as gardening and crafts."

"Look at the big picture," Kornblau advises. "Consider the way you do things and redesign your life by cutting out the tasks that don't need to be done. Start by writing down everything you do in a day. Then focus only on what is meaningful and necessary."

Kornblau suggests some simple, but effective, things people can do to alleviate **pain** and stress:

- Establish a routine. Predictability can help alleviate stress.
- Pace yourself. Don't leave most stressful tasks for the end of the day.
- Create order in your home and workplace. Simplify your work by preparing well for any job you are doing. Gather all your materials together before you start. Take a close look at your workplace and the way you position yourself in it. Make sure your chair is comfortable. You could be sitting in a wrong type of chair. Change your lighting if necessary. Fluorescent lighting has a buzzing noise that can create stress. Use indirect lighting.
- Light candles and/or use aromatherapy. Lavender, for example, is very calming.
- Make jokes and find things that make you laugh—humor is helpful tool in relieving stress.
- Play with a pet.

Simone Heurich, RYT, Yoga Instructor

Simone Heurich has been practicing hatha yoga for more than thirty years. As a yoga instructor, she often works with people who are stressed and in **pain**.

According to Heurich, "Hatha yoga, the oldest form of self care, addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person to bring balance and well-being. Hatha yoga includes poses, breathing techniques, relaxation, and meditation. Poses improve posture through stretching, toning, and strengthening the muscles, joints, and spine. They also stimulate and balance internal organs, glands, and the nervous, circulatory, and respiratory systems. Through proper breathing, the mind is calmed, and the whole body is cleansed and revitalized. Through relaxation, the body and mind are completely rested. Through focusing and quieting the mind in meditation, there is a marked reduction in stress and an increased clarity and inner peace."

How does she work with patients who are stressed and in **pain**? Heurich explains, "We want people to slow down enough so they notice what they're feeling. Then, we ask them to focus on breathing. When people are in **pain** they often don't know what to do. They feel stress and tension in their bodies and hold their breath. This sets up a chain reaction where the sympathetic nervous system and the 'fight or flight' response come into play. When this happens, they get further from being in a relaxed place."

"Next, we ask people to notice where their discomfort is. We have them see that because of the discomfort they're tense," Heurich continues. "By just *noticing*, things change. Breathing gets a little easier, fuller, and deeper. People begin feeling a shift in sensations and they get more comfortable. They feel that there's possibility—that they can change something. We always reassure people that their abilities are fine where they are, and that whatever they are able to do is okay. If they need to stop, that's fine too."

Heurich's tips for relieving stress:

- Live fully, laugh often, and love much.
- Think about your breath at different times of the day—when you wake up, at work, or even at the supermarket. Place one hand on belly and the other on chest. See where you're breathing from. Fill the lungs from bottom to top. Imagine receiving a wonderful gift. Release breath from top to bottom, softly letting go. This is calming to nervous system and gives you more clarity of thought.
- Look at yourself in a mirror. Observe yourself in a kind and caring way. Look for beauty, but also the unevenness. That's often where we have discomfort because things are not positioned in an optimal way. Check to see that the feet are parallel and the knees are straight forward. Balance your weight on both feet evenly. Let your thighs lengthen. Let your ears come over your shoulders and your collarbone broaden over your body. Center your head over your shoulders and feel connectedness and stability as your feet touch the floor.

For The **American Pain Foundation**

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