

MANAGING YOUR HEALTH

Take charge of your chronic pain

By Dr. Peter Abaci



THE INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE now estimates that chronic pain afflicts an estimated 116 million Americans, making it one of the major health problems of our time and one of the biggest reasons people see their doctors or miss work. Odds are that at least one member in every family is dealing with pain at this very moment. Chronic pain can affect every aspect of your life, from how you move your body to what you think and feel.

When you think of pain, you are likely to think about acute pain, which is a symptom of tissue damage and inflammation when you first get injured. This type of pain often gets better with a little rest and responds well to medications.

Chronic pain is very different, because it is an experience that can overwhelm you for months and years. Chronic pain is a disease, and if you aren't careful it can rob you of things you cherish most in life, such as your independence, health, family and career. Common causes of chronic pain

include diseases of the spine, fibromyalgia and arthritis, and it is often accompanied by depression, insomnia and anxiety.

To address chronic pain, you need to start by pursuing two main lines of attack. The first is finding tools you can rely on every day. This might include everything from stretches, special exercises and meditation to taking regular breaks from the computer; with practice and persistence, you will be amazed at what you can do. For example, recent studies have found that both yoga and tai chi are effective in treating the symptoms of muscle pain associated with fibromyalgia, and also that bed rest actually aggravates back pain while walking provides relief.

The second is making the necessary lifestyle changes to create your optimum health. This means reexamining what you do with your time each day. Taking time

out each day to focus on yourself is critical to developing an effective pain-management strategy.

Give yourself a break from computers and cell phones, and spend that time preparing a healthy meal, getting some fresh air and exercise or just having some quiet moments to filter out all of the nervous energy running through your brain.

Your body will feel better when you keep it active, and your mind will stay sharper when you lower your stress. And remember, the better you are at taking care of yourself, the more effective you will be at being there for those you love. 📺



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Dr. Peter Abaci is the author of *Take Charge of Your Chronic Pain: The Latest Research, Cutting-Edge Tools, and Alternative Treatments for Feeling Better* (GPP Life, 2009; <http://takechargeofyourchronicpain.com>).