

Pain Management (At Home)

Everybody is different. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to controlling pain. What works for Patient A may not work for Patient B, and vice-versa. The following list contains a few options that may help you take control of your pain and/or inflammation naturally while outside the office.

1. Ice (cold therapy/cryotherapy) – Injuries are often accompanied by inflammation. Inflammation sensitizes nerves, which increases the amount of pain you perceive. Ice reduces pain by decreasing inflammation. Ice also reduces the swelling associated with inflammation which can put mechanical stress on pain sensitive structures.

Heat (fomentation) – Some conditions respond more favorably to heat than ice, especially chronic conditions. Heat can decrease pain, decrease muscle spasm, and increase blood flow which can speed the healing process. If heat is used too early, it can exacerbate symptoms and slow recovery. Let your doctor know if you are using ice or heat at home, so that he/she can determine its appropriateness.

2. Supplements – There are several, natural, non prescription anti-inflammatory supplements that you can use to control pain. In many instances they work better than traditional over the counter anti-inflammatories and are safer for long term use.

Food – Poor nutritional habits can slow recovery. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and a moderate amount of lean protein. Stay away from processed food, food additives, fried food, sugar, and artificial sweeteners. A multivitamin may be recommended.

3. TENS units - TENS units work by decreasing the transmission of painful impulses sent from an injured area to the central nervous system. It does so by giving the brain a competing stimulus to interpret. In layman's terms, TENS therapy gives your brain something else to think about other than pain. It's simple, but effective. TENS is frequently prescribed for control of acute, chronic, postsurgical, and post-traumatic pain. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulators (or TENS for short) have been used to help people control their pain for over forty years.

4. Kinesiotape – Kinesiotape likely works in a manner similar to a TENS unit. The skin is a very sensitive organ. Applying kinesiotape to a patch of skin over the injured area stimulates mechanoreception (movement receptors) which can decrease nociception (sensation of pain). Topical analgesics can be added over the tape for further benefit. The spray applicators work best for this.

5. Topical analgesics (pain relieving creams) – are classified into three categories based on their main active ingredient: [**A.** menthol/camphor **B.** capsaicin **C.** methyl salicylate]. **A.** Menthol and/or camphor based pain relieving ointments work as counter-irritants. Simply put, the warming and cooling sensation you feel when you apply these products to your skin distracts your mind from any pain you may be having. The pain relief wears off between ten and thirty minutes, but can be reapplied as necessary.

B. Capsaicin is the active component of chili peppers; it produces a warming sensation when it contacts the skin. Capsaicin has the ability to decrease a molecule called 'Substance P' in the skin and underlying tissues. Substance P is a protein whose primary purpose seems to be transmission of pain signals. Unlike menthol based products, capsaicin creams appear to have a cumulative effect.

C. Methyl salicylate creams help alleviate pain by absorbing into the blood stream, and then converting into salicylic acid (the active ingredient in aspirin). Studies have not decisively demonstrated this effect, and have indicated that methyl salicylate creams may reduce pain via the same mechanisms as menthol/camphor based products.

6. Orthopedic supports (braces) – Braces help in a several ways:

1. Provide support to injured tissues so they don't have to work as hard.
2. Help keep you in good position so as not to further aggravate an injury.
3. Provide a compressive force which stimulates mechanoreceptive nerve fibers that can reduce the transmission of pain.

Braces aren't indicated for every condition. Your doctor will help with recommendations.

7. Manual therapy – Manual therapy by definition is a hands-on technique or collection of techniques applied to a patient by a trained practitioner to mobilize soft tissues and joints. Some forms of manual therapy you can apply yourself. Using a foam roller, trigger point wand, or a simple tennis/lacrosse ball can be advantageous in between treatments.

These techniques should be taught to you. Do not attempt any form of self treatment without being educated on how to do it correctly.

8. Exercise – Exercise may not be indicated in acute injury conditions, your doctor can help you decide, which, if any, exercises to do. We do know that active recovery is better than passive; so your prognosis will be better if you can get back to your activities of daily living as quickly as possible.

For chronic pain, proper exercise is extremely beneficial. Your doctor will help you with a specific and appropriate exercise plan. Some exercises may be contraindicated for your condition, so don't assume all exercise is good.

Keep in mind, pain is a symptom, and not a pathology in itself. Pain is like your check engine light; it lets you know there is a problem, not necessarily what or where the problem is occurring. Pain also has a tendency to be the last symptom to manifest (tooth cavity) in a disease process and the first to leave with care (back pain). This is why regular check-ups and following through with your rehabilitation plans are critical. If you have any questions, speak with your physician.