



THE AGONIES OF CHRONIC PAIN

IT CAN BE HELL ON EARTH, OR JUST A NAGGING HURT. EITHER WAY, SUFFERERS SHOULD EXPLORE THE MANY PATHS THAT CAN OFFER RELIEF.

BY DORKYS RAMOS

■ **AS MANY AS 100 MILLION ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES SUFFER FROM CHRONIC PAIN**, according to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies—which means there’s a very good chance you or someone close to you is one of those sufferers, or will be at some point in life. Whatever the cause—and there are many, from migraines and back injuries to arthritis and cancer—pain often leads to loss of productivity, sleep deprivation, depression, and worse, and patients need to know where to search for relief.

“If somebody starts having chronic pain—pain that lasts more than three months and has failed conservative management like physical therapy and medication—a pain specialist can determine the exact cause and prevent unnecessary treatment,” says Ricardo Vallejo, M.D., Ph.D., director of research at Millennium Pain Center, in Bloomington, Ill. With an increasing number of ways to manage constant physical discomfort, the key lies in finding the treatment plan that works best for you. Here, a few ways to fight back against chronic pain.

PHYSICAL THERAPY AND EXERCISES can help control chronic pain by strengthening, stretching, and adding flexibility to muscles. A physical therapist can ensure that you’re not performing motions that might exacerbate the problem.



MEDICAL MARIJUANA

is prescribed to treat serious conditions, including cancer, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease, HIV/AIDS, and other debilitating illnesses. In the 25 states (plus Washington, D.C.) where it’s legal so far, it can be dispensed as drops, dried buds that can be used with a vaporizer, and capsules or other edibles, or applied as an ointment or patch on affected areas.

PAIN MEDICATION

choices can range from over-the-counter painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs to stronger meds like antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and opioids.

STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES

like yoga, tai chi, meditation, and deep-breathing exercises could lessen your sensitivity to ongoing pain. Relaxation techniques can also help ward off negative feelings associated with chronic pain.

ACUPUNCTURE'S

effectiveness is still being debated, but millions of Americans swear by its benefits. This ancient Chinese practice involves the insertion of tiny needles at various points throughout your body that are then manipulated by hand or via electric pulses to stimulate nerve endings and muscles and improve blood flow to the afflicted area.

BIOFEEDBACK

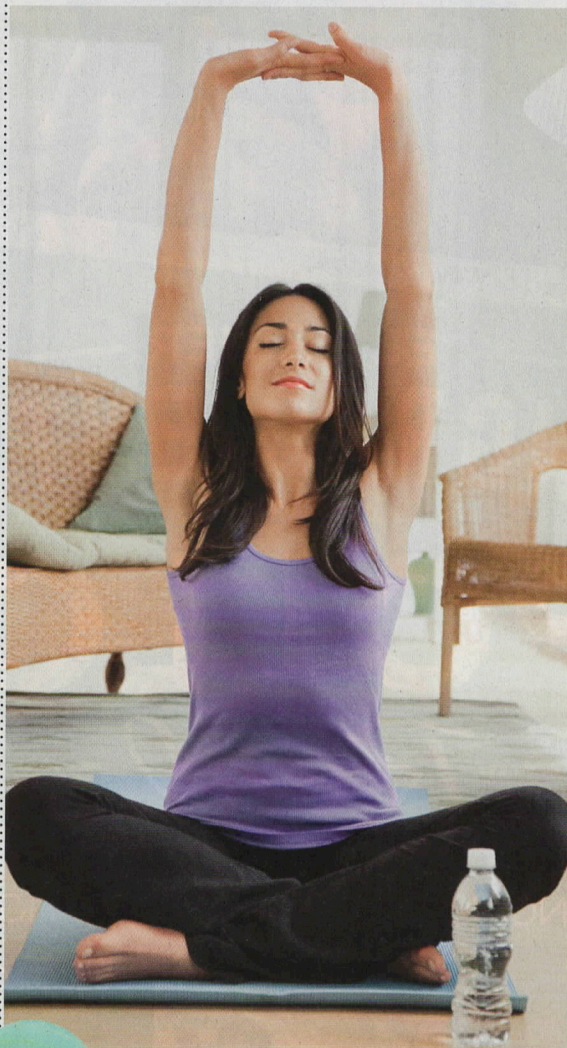
uses sensors placed across the body to help patients discover how they involuntarily respond to various sensations. They can then refocus their mind to alter bodily functions that lead to anxiety and muscle tension.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

on these and other treatment options, visit the U.S. Pain Foundation (uspainfoundation.org), the Chronic Pain Research Alliance (cpralliance.org), the American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (asra.com), or the American Academy of Pain Medicine (painmed.org), or visit your nearest pain clinic for local resources.

HEALTH TECH:

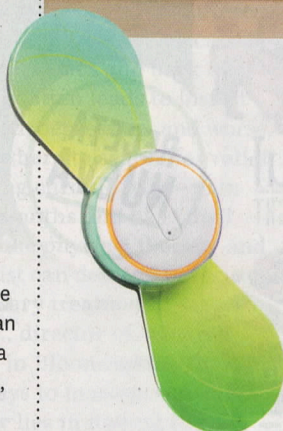
CHRONIC PAIN CAN APPEAR IN SPURTS OR AS A CONTINUOUS NUISANCE. THE TOOLS BELOW COULD BE JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED.



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iTens Small Wings

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Melt Performance Roller

Use this roller with the Melt Method to rehydrate connective tissue via a series of easy exercises. The DVD includes tutorials focusing on hand, foot, lower back, and more with creator Sue Hitzmann. \$40, meltmethod.com