



Joint Pain: Is It Time To Focus on Alternative Treatment Methods?

Most people have experienced pain in their joints at one time or another but perhaps wouldn't realize that nationwide, joint pain is actually an overwhelming problem. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports in their most recent survey conducted from 2013-2015 that approximately 54.5 million people were diagnosed with arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, gout or fibromyalgia, which are all ailments involving pain in the joints.

Although arthritis is the main culprit, there are less severe cases where the discomfort is due to injury. In either instance, the impact on quality of life, emotional well-being and an economic cost in excess of \$500 billion a year is worthy of attention. The number of people affected by joint pain is expected to grow at an uncomfortably fast rate; reaching over 78 million by 2040. An aging population, the prevalence of a sedentary lifestyle and an increase in obesity are contributing to this rapid increase in patients.

Joints are what give us the ability to do just about everything from simply getting out of bed and walking to the kitchen for coffee, to maintaining a more rigorous fitness routine. Unfortunately, just for that functionality, our joints are inherently vulnerable to injury, chronic conditions and disease. Studies have shown that instability is also a concern because this can lead to more long-term chronic conditions (Department of Orthopedic Surgery, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS., 2015). Joint injuries and disease account for more than 150 million doctor and hospital visits and over \$300 billion in medical costs annually (Arthritis Foundation, 2013). For those inflicted with some form of arthritis, the Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2013) reports that as much as \$2,000 a year is spent on treatment and more than \$4,000 of annual income is lost due to sick days and immobility.

Treatment plans can be a tricky business because the pain reported by patients doesn't always match the imaging and is highly individualized. In most recent years, the opioid addiction epidemic has opened the mindset of practitioners to more holistic treatment options with fewer side effects and chance for dependency.

Some examples of first treatment options after initial diagnosis are:

- Weight management: maintaining a healthy weight within recommended guidelines reduces the stress on joints which in turn increases mobility and energy levels.
- Exercise: learning the right way to exercise, maintaining proper form and working with a professional will help joints to heal and increase muscle strength and range of motion.

- Ice and heat: learning when to use cold or heat to help alleviate swelling will assist in recovery.
- Behavior Modification: Providing education on understanding our own thoughts and feelings, essentially using the Gate Control Theory. Also, teaching coping skills with relaxation techniques and home practice for pain management (Francis J. Keefe, Duke Medical Center 2009).
- Anti-inflammatory over-the-counter medication (NSAIDs): these help to inhibit the inflammatory immune response to reduce pain and swelling. However, side effects ranging from stomach upset and headaches to more severe implications to the liver and kidneys are a concern with prolonged and excessive use.

Other alternative treatment options include:

- Massage: this technique increases circulation thereby reducing pain.
- Acupuncture: using needles to stimulate pressure points throughout the body has been shown to reduce pain and increase relaxation.
- Yoga and Meditation: Slow and controlled movements involving stretching and muscle isolation can increase range of motion and the ability for patients to manage their pain.
- Topical applications: these creams, gels or patches provide relief to the affected area.
 - o Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation Therapy (TENS): the use of low voltage current to help relieve pain.
 - o Salicylates: the same pain-relieving substance found in aspirin
 - o Capsaicin: which depletes the nerve cells inhibiting pain messages.
 - o Menthol and camphor: produce hot or cold feelings which supersede the ability to feel pain.

In recent years, new studies in relieving joint pain have focused on Cannabidoil (CBD) as a topical analgesic. In a 2016 study by the University of Pharmacy in Kentucky, rats with significant induced swelling, mimicking the symptoms of monoarthritis, had reduced swelling and pain markers after treatment with topical CBD gel. Other studies have focused on the Endocannabinoid System as a target for topical treatments as it is an integral part of maintaining homeostasis throughout the Central Nervous System.

The findings thus far are promising but more studies and research are needed and are in progress. As these results are made available, Canbiola will provide the information to clients.

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