

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/conhp)



## Pain Management Alternatives

### Introduction

Pain is something we all experience at some point. According to the National Institute of Health, “pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined” and is “cited as the most common reason Americans access the health care system.” Our culture tends to seek over the counter or prescription medications when we suffer from pain rather than looking to alternatives. With the opioid epidemic on the rise, it is important to be aware of other pain relief methods and options. They include exercise, application of hot or cold, mind-body techniques, therapeutic massage, and physical therapy.

### Exercise

When you are in pain, it can be hard to imagine exercising. There are multiple benefits of exercise including weight loss, improved cardiovascular health, and improved mood. According to Physiopedia, a very important benefit of exercising is improved pain control. Both aerobic and resistance exercise can be used to decrease pain perception.

The following guidelines are presented by Physiopedia:

- Aerobic exercise should:
  - Target larger muscle groups
  - Involve repetitive muscle contraction
  - Elevate resting heart rate to target heart rate for at least 20 minutes

Easy and great ways to achieve this is by taking a brisk walk, swimming, or biking. Yoga and tai chi incorporate relaxation and meditation with exercise and can also be beneficial. The Red Wolf Center offers group exercise classes, treadmills, stationary bikes, weight machines, and more. More information can be found at <http://www.astate.edu/a/campus-recreation/red-wolf-center/index.dot>.

### Hot and Cold

The application of hot and cold can help alleviate aches and pains. It is important to use them safely and correctly.

### **Cold:**

- Ice packs can be used for acute injuries, or injuries that have recently occurred.
- Applying cold can be used to numb the area and prevent blood flow to slow inflammation.
- Apply for no more than 15 minutes and then take it off for at least 15 minutes.
- To make your own ice pack at home use a gallon freezer bag and fill it with 1 part rubbing alcohol and 3 parts water and then freeze.

### **Heat:**

- Heat is good for chronic or recurring pain.
- Heat helps improve blood flow to facilitate healing and allows relaxation of muscles and tissues.
- Heat can be applied 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off.
- It is important to ensure not to overheat the area.

### **Safety Considerations:**

- Cold or hot therapy should not be used if there is any decreased sensation in the area.
- Never fall asleep with a cold or hot pack on your body.

## Mind-Body Techniques

According to Harvard's *Healthbeat*, mind-body techniques include "meditation, mindfulness, and breathing exercises." These techniques can "alleviate pain by changing the way you perceive it." The publication describes several tactics to decrease the pain you experience:

- **Deep breathing:**
  - Take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds before exhaling.
  - There are multiple phone applications available to help guide you.
- **Meditation and the relaxation response:**
  - Deep breathing while thinking about the breaths, listening to calming music, or using imagery.
  - Close your eyes, relax your muscles, and concentrate on taking deep breaths.
- **Mindfulness:**
  - Mindfulness is essentially being aware of the details, senses, and emotions occurring while performing a task.
  - *58* suggests choosing an activity you enjoy and practice being mindful of those things throughout the activity.
- **Positive thinking:**
  - Focus on what can be done, rather than what you cannot do.
  - Keep a journal of things you are thankful for.
- **Yoga and tai chi:**
  - These types of exercise "incorporate breath control, meditation, and movements to stretch and strengthen muscles."

- There are multiple resources including group classes, phone applications, videos, and websites that can help you get started.

## Therapeutic Massage

Everyone knows a good massage can make you feel better when stressed or experiencing aching muscles. The American Massage Therapy Association states that "massage therapy can provide significant improvement for pain, anxiety, and health-related quality of life for those looking to manage their pain." Also, according to Harvard's *Healthbeat*, it may relax muscles, tendons and joints, relieve stress, and impede pain sensation. For the best results, a professional is necessary. A licensed massage therapist can be found by using the search at <https://www.amtamassage.org/findamassage/index.html>. The website also provides information about what to expect, types of massages, and more.

## Physical Therapy

Physical therapists are movement specialists. They use movement to heal and incorporate all of the aspects discussed previously into care for patients on an individualized basis. They identify the source of the pain and prescribe exercises, utilize massage and modalities such as hot and cold, and other treatments to help patients heal. Physical therapy is a comprehensive approach to pain management and is often utilized instead of pharmaceuticals and/or surgery. For some, walking or using hot or cold may alleviate pain. Others may need

an individualized plan developed by a professional. Ask your doctor if they believe physical therapy could be beneficial. Also, in Arkansas you may seek physical therapy without a doctor's referral but need to contact your insurance company to see if it is covered.

## References

- [https://www.physio-pedia.com/Exercise\\_and\\_Activity\\_in\\_Pain\\_Management](https://www.physio-pedia.com/Exercise_and_Activity_in_Pain_Management)
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/8-non-invasive-pain-relief-techniques-that-really-work>
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- <https://www.amtamassage.org/research/Massage-Therapy-Research-Roundup/Research-Roundup--Massage-Therapy-for-Pain-Management.html>

## Other News:

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Katie Sellers, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.