

Managing My Arthritis Pain: Never Underestimate the Power of the Mind

"Dealing with pain can be the hardest part of having arthritis or a related condition, but you can learn to manage it and its impact on your life."

Martha Smith



Pain is your body's alarm system that tells you something is wrong. It should not be ignored, but evaluated to identify what problems may be occurring. When tissues in your body (even the smallest unit in the body called a cell) are injured, nerves in the affected area release chemical signals. These signals in turn recruit other chemicals and cells into the injured area. While other nerves connected to your brain are activated, where they are ultimately recognized and perceived as pain.

Pain often tells you that you need to act. For example, if you touch a hot stove, almost instantly pain signals from your brain make you pull your hand away. This type of pain helps protect you. Long-lasting or chronic pain, like the kind that accompanies osteoarthritis is different. While it tells you that something is wrong, it triggers compensatory chemicals and cells which make treating this type of pain more difficult. Often the swelling that develops with arthritis results in more pain. Managing this type of pain often takes a different approach with an emphasis of improving functions that are essential to enhance your quality of life and sense of well-being, as well as pain.

Not all pain is alike. Just as there are different types of arthritis, there are also different types of pain. Even your own pain may vary from day to day. The experience of pain is both a physical and emotional condition. Pain has many different factors that influence what one ultimately feels, including emotions, social factors such as fears and anxieties, previous pain experiences, energy level, attitude about your condition, and the way people react to your pain. When treating chronic pain, it is important to address the emotional (anxiety, depression, stress) and the physical components of pain.

There are factors that improve and make worse pain. Pain signals travel through a system of nerves through the spinal cord and to the brain. At times, your body tries to stop these signals by creating chemicals that help block pain signals. These chemicals, called endorphins, are morphine-like painkilling substances that decrease the pain sensation.

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Amanda Cochran, MOTA, June 2006

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Different factors cause the body to produce endorphins:

What can make your pain feel worse?	Focusing on pain
Increased disease activity	Fatigue
Stress	Anxiety

What can block pain signals?

Positive attitude and pleasant thoughts	Massage
Appropriate exercise	Distraction
Relaxation	Topical pain relievers
Medications	Humor
	Heat and cold treatments

Many farmers and ranchers with arthritis have found that by learning and practicing pain management skills, they can reduce their pain. Farmers and ranchers with chronic pain must take an active role in managing their pain and not be a “passenger” in their own condition. The good news is that there are many methods and options in treating pain. Numerous resources for treatment are also available in your community.

There are many different ways to deal with the pain associated with arthritis. In order to maintain a productive, fulfilling, and active lifestyle, farmers and ranchers have a responsibility to take control over their arthritis symptoms before it takes control over them.

Finding the time to try these tips and techniques may present a challenge at first, as the job of farming and ranching never seems to end. However, the agricultural sector is dedicated to making sacrifices in the short-term for the gain in the long term. That same frame of mind should be used when deciding to implement relaxation techniques into your daily routine. Rewards may be reaped as you are better able to manage your arthritis pain and in turn better able to participate in your way of life.

Reference:

Good Living, Winter Dec., Jan., Feb, 2006 Newsletter, Eastern Missouri Chapter, Arthritis Foundation; MANISH SUTHAR, MD, PAIN PREVENTION & REHABILITATION, WWW. PAINPREVENTION.NET, 314.469.7246.