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CreakyJoints Presents

Pain Explained: Where to Start -Treatment Options and Coping Strategies (Part 3)

From what we've learned from researchers, we now know that the experience of chronic pain is both physical and emotional. Science teaches us that a combination of treatment approaches is the most beneficial when managing chronic pain. This may include medication, non-medication, as well as complementary therapies and more.

First let's talk about one approach to treating pain: medication.

There are a variety of medication options that are important and help you manage your pain, some may even be used to control symptoms, such as disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), over-the-counter drugs, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) including ibuprofen, aspirin, and others, antidepressants, opioids, and others.

Essentially DMARDs alter the course of your disease. They halt the progression of bone damage, bone erosion, and so, alter your pain levels. To learn more, CreakyJoints offers a free webinar session which takes a fascinating look at [How DMARDs for Arthritis Actually Work in Your Body](#).

Along with DMARDs and over-the-counter treatments, there are many different medications a patient can take, as prescribed by their doctor.

One class of medication is called opioids. Opioids are medications that work with your brain, spinal cord, and other areas of your body to essentially send the message that you are not in pain, which can be significant for patients living with moderate to severe pain.

However, as with any medication or treatment approach, there may be risks involved with taking this type of medication over time. Opioid risks may include injuries, overdoses, addiction, motor vehicle accidents, and serious life threatening and other health consequences (Thakral, et al., 2017). Therefore, it's extremely important to discuss all your options with your doctor.

There are also challenges when it comes to this type of treatment approach. Similar to CBD treatments, there are different rules from state-to-state regarding this treatment approach.

Additionally, over the last several decades millions of people have been impacted by opioid misuse. Data from 2018 showed that every day, 128 people in the United States died after overdosing on opioids, according to NIH's National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH, 2020). Further, since the 1990s the misuse, overdoses, and deaths associated with opioid use led to the Department of Health and Human Services to declare a public health emergency in 2017 (DHHS, 2019).

As stated, for some patients there are potential benefits to being prescribed opioids as way to manage chronic pain, but there is still research that needs to be done in this area, especially with regards to long-term use. It is also unclear as to how much pain patients experience after they end long-term opioid treatment (Thakral, et al., 2017).

In a PCORI-funded study, [“Evaluating a Program to Lower Prescription Opioid Doses for Patients with Chronic Pain,”](#) researchers wanted learn if a program that evaluated lowered doses over time would help to reduce the risks that go along with long-term opioid use (Thakral, et al., 2017). During the dose-lowering phase, the rate of opioid overdoses decreased at clinics with the program, but not more than it did for clinics without the program.

In this study, out of the 300 participants, pain intensity after discontinuation of long-term opioid use did not, on average, worsen for patients and may slightly improve, particularly for patients with mild-to-moderate pain at the time of discontinuation.

Again, each patient is different and therefore the amount of medication a doctor prescribes, and pain intensity varies from person to person. It will be up to you and your doctor to determine what is the safest and most effective approach for you. Next, let's talk about a few non-medication approaches.

Understanding effective psychological interventions and coping techniques

After months, years, and more of dealing with pain, our thoughts, feelings and emotions can lead to symptoms of depression, our stress levels can go up, our sleep may be poor, and we may take pain medications in an effort to find relief.

In addition to medication approaches, sometimes psychological interventions and coping techniques may be explored with your healthcare team. You may also contact your insurance company, either by phone or online, to see if there are any mental health supports available. If you're concerned about cost for this treatment, some providers offer “sliding fee scale”, where patients pay lower rates, based on financial need. Other types of financial assistance might also be available to individuals seeking psychological support.

There are many different types of therapies that can help you manage your pain such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychotherapy and other types of counseling. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, is a proven therapeutic technique that patients can use to address the psychological impact of living with pain.

In her research about cognitive behavioral therapy, Dr. Beverly Thorn and her team have found that strategies like breathing, relaxation, and acknowledging or naming the pain may help patients manage chronic lower back pain.

In the next podcast session, Dr. Thorn will provide us with an in-depth look at cognitive behavioral therapy and how you may use CBT to better manage your pain.

Cognitive behavioral therapy is one example of how you may better cope with the emotional effects of pain, but what about other treatment options?

Along with medication, counseling and other therapeutic techniques, there are many other treatments for you and your doctor to consider. For example, physical activity such as exercise, physical therapy, yoga, Tai Chi, aqua therapy, supplements, CBD, vitamins, medical marijuana, nutrition such as diets which involve avoiding processed foods, gluten-free diets, and autoimmune protocols (known as the AIP), all may be explored with one's doctor.

We'll provide a more in-depth look at these potential options and what we call "complementary therapies" in *Pain Explained: Health and Wellness (Part 4)*.

Lastly, keeping track of how you are feeling each day and in between appointments can help your doctor better understand what you are experiencing. Tools like ArthritisPower can help you better manage symptoms and track how you are feeling, sleeping, and reacting to medication. These may be symptoms and measures that your labs and other tests may not be revealing.

We will talk more on the benefits of tools such as ArthritisPower in *Pain Explained: Is My Treatment Plan Working? (Part 5)*. In the meantime, visit www.arthritispower.org to learn more.

Thank you for listening and we hope you found this information helpful. Remember to take the one question quiz to receive your free resources.