



Mind-Body Techniques to Reduce Pain

These **simple, no-cost exercises** can be used **anywhere** to manage the symptoms of chronic pain. These strategies have been proven effective at reducing stress and relieving pain. As with any condition, please consult with a medical professional regarding your specific needs.

1. Relaxation breathing *(also known as diaphragmatic breathing)*

How it works: You may wonder how breathing could impact pain. It turns out that during the stress response our breath becomes shallow and from the chest. This helps us to mobilize into flight or fight mode. When we are relaxed our breathing naturally comes from the diaphragm a tiny muscle at the base of the lungs. When our diaphragm is involved in the breath it takes pressure off of the neck and back muscles. Fortunately, learning to breathe from this area can send a message to the brain that all is well and this turns off the alarm system, which reduces muscle tension throughout the body. In addition, there is some research that relates chronic pain to lack of oxygen due to muscle constriction. Diaphragmatic breathing can help bring oxygen throughout the body more efficiently. This kind of breathing has also been shown to reduce anxiety.

Get started: www.health.harvard.edu/lung-health-and-disease/learning-diaphragmatic-breathing

2. Gentle movement

How it works: It may seem counter-intuitive to move when you are in pain. In fact, your instincts may be telling you the opposite, to rest and protect the painful area rather than 'stress' it. We may fear making the pain worse by being active. This is often true and helpful for acute pain, such as a broken arm or sprained ankle. However, there is strong evidence that exercise is helpful for chronic pain.

Exercise can reduce pain in several ways:

- It can release stress
- It releases brain chemicals that make us feel good
- It can help to loosen muscle tension and reduce the pain associated with it

You may want to start with gentle stretching and work your way up to other activities such as swimming and walking. Start out slowly, perhaps 5 or 10 minutes at a time, 1 or 2 days a week and work up to 5 days a week. Research shows being consistent is important. With chronic pain that tends to go up and down from day to day, there is a temptation to do as much as you can on a 'good' relatively pain free day. You may find however that you 'pay for it' the next few days. It is best to pace yourself and do a little each day and build up gradually.

Get started: <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/movement-with-pain/>
www.healthline.com/health/exercises-to-reduce-chronic-pain



3. Imagery/meditation/hypnosis

How it works: You may wonder how a mental image can help reduce chronic physical pain. Just thinking about a possible threat can trigger our stress response. You can experience this now by thinking of something stressful and noticing the reaction in your body.

Sometimes we are not even aware that our muscles tense up in response to a thought or a feeling. However, we can train ourselves to notice muscle tension and to use relaxation techniques like breathing to reverse the response. We can also use mental images and thoughts to evoke the relaxation response.

You can try this now by thinking of a very relaxing image, perhaps a place where you always feel good. It can be a favorite color, a beloved pet, whatever works for you. You can see that thinking of something stressful creates stress in your body and thinking of something relaxing creates relaxation in your body. This has also been found using brain scans – when people think of doing a task, the same area in the brain is activated as when they actually do the task. Focusing on a relaxing image can evoke a relaxing response. In simple mediation, or mindfulness meditation, people are taught to focus on an image or their breath, notice when they are distracted, and gently bring back their attention to the intended focus. This helps us learn to be more aware of our thoughts and feelings and to accept them without increasing our stress response and muscle tension. This is one way that meditation can help to reduce pain. Self-hypnosis can also be helpful in being able to reduce muscle tension and its associated pain.

Get started: www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/treatments/natural/other-therapies/mind-body-pain-relief/guided-imagery.php