

Introduction

This easy-to-implement 5-step guide may be the little push you need to start better understanding your pain and managing it naturally.

Chronic pain numbers are on the rise around the world, and one of the main reasons for it is relying on a “pill for every occasion”, in line with environmental factors (the overwhelming presence of chemicals in our lives) and lifestyle choices that people make.

Most pain killers don’t even attempt to address the cause of the pain that is inflammation in a vast majority of cases, they only mask the symptoms. But the symptoms are there to tell us that something is not right and needs attention. By ignoring or suppressing them, the underlying problem grows deeper and becomes more difficult to handle.

The first step towards living a better-quality life is mindfulness – simply paying attention and noticing the cause – effect relationship between what we do and how we feel. Then, even small, simple tweaks can produce surprisingly good results.

Let’s try. If you follow these 5 steps for a month, you will, most likely, see the difference in how you feel.

Step #1: Attempt to better understand your pain

To do so, ask yourself the following questions:

Question #1: Is the pain mechanical, or inflammatory?

If a nerve is being crushed by a physical damage, there likely is only one answer – surgery. This kind of pain is usually more intense, and it gets magnified by certain movements. It may be caused by an injury or a degenerative condition. In some cases, though, especially after painful injuries or invasive treatments, the pain is caused not by the damage itself but by overly tight muscles around it, as the body is trying to protect the weak spot from being hurt even more. If so, moving the painful area to relax the tension, not keeping it still, is the counterintuitive remedy.

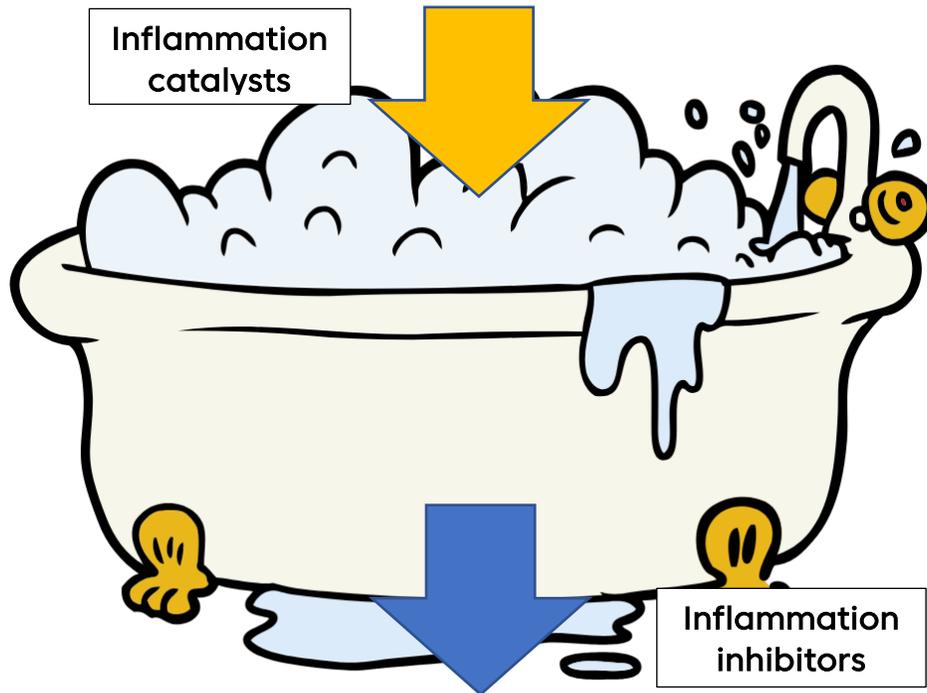
MOST painful conditions fall into the inflammatory category; therefore, they can be improved by reducing inflammation. The list includes but is not limited to arthritis, lupus, heart disease, atherosclerosis, sciatica, ankylosing spondylitis, asthma, tuberculosis, diabetes, obesity, chronic peptic ulcer, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, as well as some cancers.

Chronic inflammation is a long-term reaction of the body that can last from several months to many years. It can result from:

- Body's failure to eliminate whatever was causing an acute inflammation
- An autoimmune disorder that attacks normal healthy tissue, mistaking it for a pathogen that causes disease
- A persistent exposure to a low level of an irritant, such as an industrial chemical or a certain type of food, over a long period of time
- Obesity or on-going stress

Inflammation in our bodies is like a bathtub. If the faucet (of the factors that promote inflammation) is open, but the drain (the factors that reduce it) is closed, it fills fast and starts spilling over. With both open, the only way to prevent the tub from filling up is to ensure that the drain has higher capacity than the faucet. The in-flow can be significantly reduced, yet completely closing it is likely not an option – by far too many external factors that we have no control over contribute to the inflammation in our bodies.

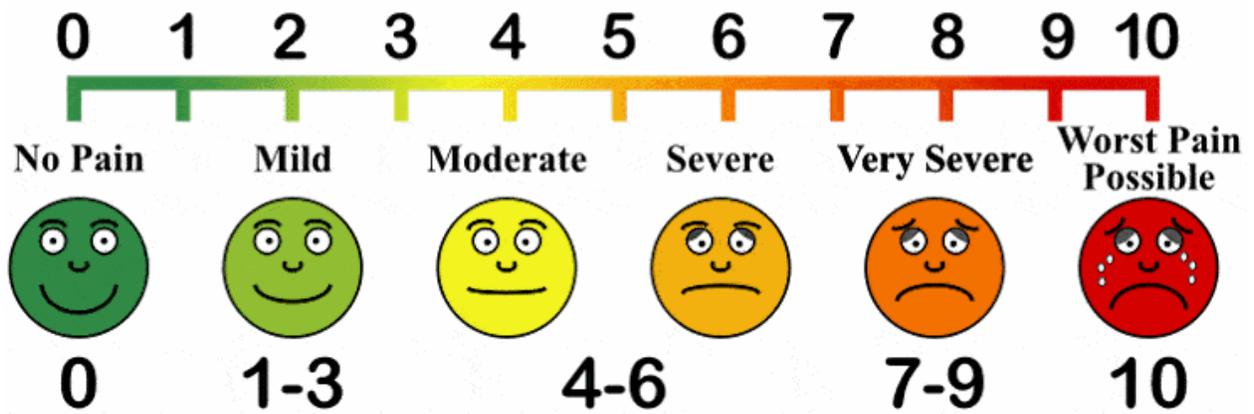
So, let's talk about both turning down the flow and improving the drainage.



But first, it's a good idea to assess the situation.

Question #2: What's your current pain score?

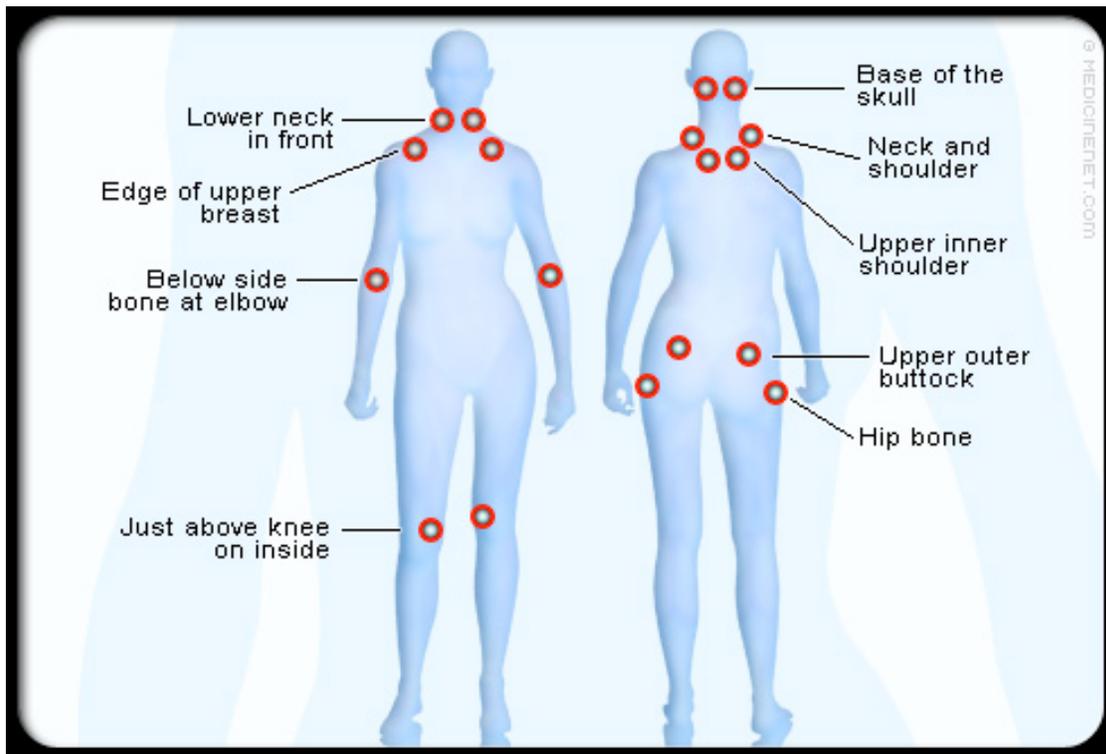
In evaluating pain, a subjective scale can help to understand the intensity level of it. Let's use the "McGill Pain Questionnaire":



This scale is useful to repeat regularly to document the progress AND the factors that may have influenced how you feel. In many cases people are aware of immediate pain but not aware of changes in pain. Using a measurement tool can help you better understand the dynamics.

Question #3: How many trigger points are involved?

The following picture depicts 18 common pain trigger points. 14 or more would require a longer and more concentrated pain management program.



Question #4: Do you experience additional symptoms, like insomnia or weakened immunity?

Your answers to the questions 1-4 will largely determine the best treatment regimen to achieve the results that you are looking for.



Step #2: Commit to 1-3 anti-inflammatory treatment modalities

Although inflammation can be effectively reduced by changes in nutrition and hydration in line with certain lifestyle choices, **a better result will be achieved faster if you give your body a boost.**

Enhanced blood flow is required to reduce inflammation, and numerous nature-based circulation-boosting treatments are currently available at wellness centers. Many of them involve heat, cold, or the alteration of the two.

Whole body cryotherapy is probably the most effective of them all, as it initiates the powerful “fight or flight” reaction in the body. This treatment involves a very short exposure to extremely low temperatures that are perceived by the body as not survivable. For details, read the articles about inflammation and how cryotherapy reduces it and look for the closest cryotherapy provider to give it a try.

One treatment will feel good but, to achieve sustainable results, consecutive treatments are required.

Many studies have compared the results of 5, 10 and 20 3-minute long whole-body cryo-stimulations, performed once a day at -130°C (-202°F). It has been concluded that **noticeable improvement occurs after at least 10 cryotherapy sessions, while the most advantageous sequence is the series of 20 cryo-stimulations.**

The number of required treatments and the recommended frequency will also depend on your pain assessment results (step #1 above).

Here is an example of two treatment regimens, depending on the pain score:

Protocol A

Number of treatments: 20

Frequency of treatments: Five days per week (weekdays)

Duration of treatments: 4 weeks

Best for people with higher subjective pain scores, and more secondary chronic symptoms:

- Pain scores of 6 or over
- Pain over most trigger points
- Additional symptoms including insomnia, headaches and weakened immunity

Protocol B

Number of treatments: 12

Frequency of treatments: twice weekly

Duration of treatments: 6 weeks

This regimen is recommended to people with lower subjective pain scores and fewer or no secondary chronic symptoms:

- Pain scores of 5 or under
- Pain over not more than 14 trigger points
- No or occasional additional symptoms like insomnia, headaches and weakened immunity



Step #3: EXCLUDE ONE inflammatory item from the list of foods you eat regularly and ADD ONE anti-inflammatory product that you eat rarely

As much as it would be great to review and revise your entire diet, fundamental changes are difficult to make and even more challenging to stick to. So, let's admit that we are all humans and **make a conscious decision to introduce one change at a time.**

What to exclude?

The top 5 most inflammatory foods in the American diet include:

- Most cooking oils (vegetable, canola, soy, corn) and everything deep fried
- Refined carbohydrates (wheat flour in all its applications)
- Sugar in all its forms, including fruit juices, sodas, lemonades and other sugary drinks
- Commercially raised red meats
- Artificial sweeteners

The reasons why these products are truly damaging deserve a separate article – there are many, and the harm goes deep and lasts long. For now, just assess and score the above based on how much and how often you consume each item and **pick the one with the highest score.** This one should be the one you swap for healthier alternatives.

What to add?

The top 5 anti-inflammatory food choices are:

- Dark leafy greens (spinach, kale, collard greens, etc.)
- Good quality oils (avocado oil or coconut oil for cooking, extra virgin olive oil for salads)
- Fatty fish
- Red, purple and dark berries
- Nuts (remember that peanut is NOT a nut but a legume)

You should be consuming all of these as often as possible, but, for now, just **pick one that you could eat more and consciously include it in your diet.**

For even more benefits, make sure to **stay hydrated**. Water is essential in metabolic processes and waste elimination – consume at least 3 full size glasses of water throughout the day.

Once you get used to the first changes in your diet, consider reducing or excluding one more inflammatory item and adding even more healthy stuff. Just **approach it step-by-step for sustainable results**. It takes at least 3 weeks to form a habit. Campaigns are usually short-lived.



Step #4: Add just 15-30 minutes of movement per day

Whether you don't move much at all or already have your favorite exercise, **consider adding just 15 minutes of activity every day.**

If you are in pain, it should be a low impact activity that is possible in your condition – a walk, a swim, a short bike ride, or a bit of gentle or restorative yoga.

Make sure NOT to exclude the part that hurts most. More pain often comes from tightness around the harmed area. Increased blood flow loosens it up and helps reduce inflammation; so, the pain lessens over time or goes away all together.

If the pain you experience is musculoskeletal, consider some foam roller exercises to get out those nagging muscle knots and to fix muscle imbalances that lead to poor posture and related pain. Foam rollers are affordable and come with simple instructions that are easy to follow at home.

Like with introducing changes in nutrition, the key here is taking one little step at a time rather than going from one extreme to another. Get your body used to the change and crave more. When it happens, you are ready for another notch up. This is the only way to make the improvement permanent.



Step #5: Take 5 minutes every night to track your progress

The best way to start paying attention to “how you feel why” is **journaling**. It can be as simple as choosing a 5-minute time slot that works with your schedule (for example, right before going to bed) and sitting down with a notebook to score your pain for the day and to reflect on what you did throughout it.

If you feel better than the day before, pay attention to what you did differently and take a note. If you feel worse, the same. Then, try to do just a bit more of what works and just a bit less of what does not. Make it a habit.

Small hinges swing big doors. Little changes can lead to remarkable results over time. Just remember that symptoms are not enemies to be destroyed, but messengers to encourage us to take a better care of ourselves.

Disclaimer: This guide is a summary of some well-known practices that have proven to be effective in reducing inflammation and managing pain. If followed promptly, it may help achieve improvement in as little as 30 days. At the same time, every condition is different, and the result depends on many factors. By no means should this document serve as a success guarantee or as a replacement for medical advice.