

# Alternative Pain Reduction Options

*The following list includes treatment options for people seeking relief from pain (some also apply to anxiety), which have a very low to no risk of addiction. The intention of this list is to provide alternatives for people who are in recovery from any form of Substance Use Disorder to avoid reactivating their substance abuse problem. This list is not intended to provide medical advice, which should only be sought from a licensed medical practitioner.*

## **Medications:**

**Over the counter pain medications.** Such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or NSAIDs, such as Advil, Motrin, Naprosyn, and Voltaren.

**Anticonvulsants.** Drugs used to treat seizure disorders have been effective in chronic pain relief. It's still unclear how they control pain, but the drugs are believed to soften the effects on nerve-related pain such as postherpetic neuralgia from shingles. These include Lyrica, Neurontin, and Tegretol.

**Antidepressants.** Low doses of common antidepressants are being prescribed for many chronic pain problems. These drugs adjust levels of brain chemicals, which are thought to be a mechanism for helping to control pain.

Antidepressants often help when patients don't get complete chronic pain relief from other treatments. They relieve pain whether the person is depressed or not. The doses needed to treat pain are usually lower than doses used for depression treatment.

- Elavil, Pamelor, and Norpramin are tricyclic antidepressants prescribed to help treat pain, especially cancer pain, nerve pain from diabetic neuropathy, and postherpetic neuralgia pain from shingles. They affect levels of the brain chemicals norepinephrine and serotonin.
- Cymbalta is a serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI), which increases availability of the brain chemicals serotonin and norepinephrine. Cymbalta is FDA-approved for the treatment of diabetic neuropathy, fibromyalgia, and musculoskeletal pain like that of osteoporosis and chronic low back pain.

**Pain relief creams.** Topical painkillers like Zostrix, which contains capsaicin, are often helpful. Capsaicin works by reducing transmission of a pain-relaying chemical called substance P to the brain. Products with these ingredients also work: salicylate (found in products like Aspercreme and Bengay), a substance that decreases inflammation and relieves pain; and counter-irritants like camphor, eucalyptus oil, and menthol, which relieve pain by causing either coolness or heat at the pain site.

**Skin patches.** A transdermal patch that contains lidocaine can offer chronic pain relief. The patches are FDA-approved for chronic nerve pain from shingles, a condition known as postherpetic neuralgia. Lidoderm and Lidopain are two lidocaine skin patches, available by prescription. Capsaicin also comes in a patch applied by your doctor called Qutenza. It can be used every three months.

## **Targeted Procedures:**

**Nerve blocks.** When a group of nerves is causing pain to a specific organ or body region, the pain can be blocked with injection of a local anesthetic. That's a nerve block.

**Radiofrequency ablation.** In this outpatient procedure, a small area of nerve tissue is heated to decrease pain signals from that area. The procedure is conducted under guided CT imaging. A needle is inserted at the offending nerve site, then an electrical current produced by a radio wave is used for the heat-and-destroy mission. The chronic pain relief lasts for a relatively long period, from three to six months.

**TENS.** Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) therapy is helpful for short-term pain relief. The treatment involves a small device to deliver low-level electrical current when it's needed to help block pain.

**Trigger point injection.** Trigger points are painful sites in muscle or connective tissue. Trigger points can irritate the nerves around them and cause pain in other parts of the body. Extreme tenderness can also develop in nearby muscles or regions of the body. In a trigger point injection, a local anesthetic (sometimes with a steroid) is injected into trigger point to relieve the pain. It typically takes only a few treatments to resolve pain.

**Pain pacemakers.** The technique is called spinal cord stimulation, and it involves a pacemaker-type device that is implanted in the body. The body delivers low-level electrical signals to the spinal cord or to specific nerves, which helps block pain signals from reaching the brain. The patient can adjust the on/off button and adjust the intensity of the electrical signals.

**Spinal drug pumps.** These are also called intrathecal pumps, because they send pain medication to the spinal cord. These are usually used to deliver narcotics; however, they are also used to deliver local anesthetics and non-narcotic medication via these implanted pumps. With the push of a button, a painkiller is delivered to the site -- to block the nerve from sending a pain signal to the spinal cord.

### Counseling:

**Individual or Group Therapy.** Living with chronic pain is hard; depression, anxiety, stress & anger can make pain worse. These negative emotions reduce the body's natural painkillers and increase the body's sensitivity to pain. With counseling, patients can learn coping skills in dealing with chronic pain. They can also figure out solutions to life problems that are causing stress or depression -- and regain a sense of control and pleasure in life.

### Alternative Treatments:

**Acupuncture.** Once seen as bizarre, acupuncture is rapidly becoming a mainstream treatment for pain. Studies have found that it works for pain caused by many conditions, including fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, back & sports injuries.

**Chiropractic manipulation.** Although mainstream medicine has traditionally regarded spinal manipulation with suspicion, it's becoming a more accepted treatment.

### Stress-reduction techniques:

- **Yoga.** There's good evidence that yoga can help with chronic pain, specifically fibromyalgia, neck pain, back pain, and arthritis.
- **Relaxation therapy.** This is actually a category of techniques that help people calm the body and release tension -- a process that might also reduce pain. Some approaches teach people how to focus on their breathing. Research shows that relaxation therapy can help with fibromyalgia, headache, osteoarthritis, and other conditions.
- **Hypnosis.** Studies have found hypnosis helpful with different sorts of pain, like back pain, repetitive strain injuries & cancer pain.
- **Guided imagery.** Research shows that guided imagery can help with conditions like headache pain, cancer pain, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia. How does it work? An expert would teach you ways to direct your thoughts by focusing on specific images.
- **Music therapy.** This approach gets people to either perform or listen to music. Studies have found that it can help with many different pain conditions, like osteoarthritis and cancer pain.
- **Biofeedback.** This approach teaches you how to control normally unconscious bodily functions, like blood pressure or your heart rate. Studies have found that it can help with headaches, fibromyalgia, and other conditions.
- **Massage.** It's undeniably relaxing. And there's some evidence that massage can help ease pain from rheumatoid arthritis, neck and back injuries, and fibromyalgia.

### Exercise:

**Exercise.** Regular physical activity has big benefits for people with many different painful conditions. Study after study has found that physical activity can help relieve chronic pain, as well as boost energy and mood. If you have chronic pain, you should check in with a doctor before you start an exercise routine, especially if you have any health conditions. Your doctor might have some guidance on what to avoid, at least as you get started.

**Source:** [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

*Clinton Counseling Center Jail Program (586) 307-9570/ Family Awareness & Overdose Prevention Program/ Alt Pain Relief*