

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

## Manage Pain With Mind-Body Healing

*Unchecked pain may lengthen recovery time from illness or injury, wear down emotional well-being and erode quality of life. Many people turn to medication to treat pain, but reports of dangerous side effects continue to pile up for over-the-counter and prescription drugs alike (Arch Intern Med 2005;165:1363-9).*

*But that doesn't mean you have to suffer. Exciting research shows the power of mind-body healing to greatly reduce pain. Mind-body medicine, long a key aspect of many Eastern healing practices, harnesses the power of the mind to improve physical well-being. Now, its popularity is growing in the West as an alternative to conventional drug-based therapies. This fits in beautifully with the holistic chiropractic approach provided by Dr. Smith.*



### The Chiropractic Connection

Hippocrates wrote that “the natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well”. Mind-body medicine embraces this perspective by emphasizing the use of one’s own thoughts and emotions to restore health. It is a perfect supplement to chiropractic care, which also focuses on tapping into the body’s ability to heal itself.

The power of chiropractic, which uses gentle and safe maneuvers (*chiropractic adjustments*) to correct spinal misalignments (*vertebral subluxations*) is well documented in the correction of a myriad of health prob-

lems. By interfering with proper nervous system activity, vertebral subluxations block the body’s ability to heal itself. Conversely, removing vertebral subluxations hastens healing.

To maximize your body’s ability to heal itself, Dr. Smith recommends that patients struggling with pain consider adding any of the mind-body therapies mentioned here to regular chiropractic care. Some lend themselves easily to individual use, such as breathing exercises and meditations. Other techniques, like biofeedback and hypnosis, usually involve initial work with a therapist trained in the technique. Ask Dr. Smith about local resources.

### Breathe Your Pain Away

What could be simpler than breathing? Focused breathing dramatically influences how the mind and body perceive pain. Studies show that slow deep breathing has an analgesic effect, significantly reducing the intensity of pain (*Pain* 2010; Epub).

Breathing exercises lower stress and accompanying muscle tension, common factors that contribute to pain. In addition, focused breathing usually emphasizes use of the diaphragm rather than chest muscles. This corrects improper breathing techniques that are sometimes responsible for chronic neck pain (*Cephalalgia* 2009; 29:701-10).

Not only are they effective, but breathing exercises also have the advantages of being simple to learn, even by individuals in very poor health (*J Adv Nurs* 2006;54:710-21). Breathing exercises are also a perfect mind-body technique for the very young (*Clin Ther* 2009;31:S77-S103).



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## Meditate on Well-Being

Meditation is another easy yet highly effective mind-body technique for pain management. Meditation may also incorporate focused breathing as described on the previous page. Studies conducted during the past few years reveal impressive results from meditation as a form of pain reduction.

For instance, older adults with chronic back pain who participated in an eight-week mindfulness meditation program reported decreased pain and improved quality of life (*J Pain* 2008; 9:841-8).

Qigong, a Chinese meditation practice incorporating slow movements and controlled breathing, is the subject of several recent studies. Individuals with fibromyalgia reported significant pain reduction immediately after practicing qigong. These benefits remained evident four months later (*Disabil Rehabil* 2008;30:625-33). Similar results came from a study of individuals with chronic neck pain (*Spine* 2007;32:2415-22). And, chemotherapy patients also report lessened pain when they practice qigong before treatments (*Am J Chin Med* 2006; 34:37-46).

Why does meditation work? The slowed respiratory rate experienced during meditation lowers chemicals in the body associated with stress and pain. Meditation also encourages the detached observation of the patient's experiences. This skill may regulate perception of pain. Long-term practice

even appears to restructure regions of the brain that deal with pain (*Emotion* 2010;10:43-53).

## Take a Suggestion From Hypnosis

Hypnosis is quickly shedding its side-show image and gaining respect as a powerful mind-body technique for a variety of conditions. In clinical hypnosis, a health care professional guides the patient into a state of focused attention and suggests ideas and images related to the improvement of the health concern at hand. A review of research trials of hypnosis for chronic and acute pain shows that it is consistently effective in decreasing pain (*Contemp Hypn* 2009;26:24-39).

Self-hypnosis training is also an effective tool for pain management. It is perhaps best known for its practice by women during childbirth, who give birth with less use of sedatives, analgesia and regional anesthesia (*Am J Clin Hypn* 2007;50:109-19). Researchers have found that self-hypnosis also lessens chronic back pain (*Int J Clin Exp Hypn* 2010;58:53-68).

## Get Some Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a mind-body technique in which instruments measure bodily functions such as brainwaves, muscle tension, heart rate and respiration. The patient sees the body's responses measured in real time and uses that awareness to gain control over the body and alter its responses.



Biofeedback is effective in treating migraines and tension headaches — scientists credit this to the technique's effectiveness in reducing anxiety associated with pain (*J Consult Clin Psychol* 2008;76:379-96). Studies also show the success of biofeedback for reducing pain and health care costs associated with the jaw disorder TMD (*J Am Dent Assoc* 2007;138:202-8). And, when combined with relaxation training, biofeedback can even offer relief to advanced cancer patients (*Cancer Nurs* 2007;30:347-53).

## Chiropractic Focuses On the Whole Person

At this chiropractic office we focus on caring for the whole person. That means teaching patients about the interconnection between mind, body and spirit. We take a team approach to health care, encouraging patients to be active partners in their health care. Consequently, we encourage patients to get their mind into the healing process, as well as their bodies. Adopting a mind-body healing technique will help you do just that.

### More Resources For Mind-Body Healing From Your Doctor of Chiropractic

Check out these websites to learn more about the mind-body techniques discussed in this week's *Optimal Health University*<sup>™</sup>:

Breathing Exercises: [www.amsa.org/healingthehealer/breathing.cfm](http://www.amsa.org/healingthehealer/breathing.cfm)

Meditation: [www.meditationsociety.com](http://www.meditationsociety.com)

Hypnosis: [asch.net](http://asch.net)

Biofeedback: <http://www.aapb.org>

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