

Matrix Method for Pain Reduction

Step 1 - Gain a better understanding about chronic pain.

1. All pain, regardless of the cause, is felt in the brain.
2. Pain moves from the pain centers of the brain to the emotional centers of the brain between 3-6 months after onset of pain.
3. Structural issues like arthritis, stenosis, bulging discs, scar tissue etc. are only a part of the pain story.
4. Anything that the nervous system (pain matrix) perceives as a threat can cause or amplify pain in the brain. This can include things that we don't normally associate with pain such as blood sugar, blood pressure, previous or current stress, poor nutrition, etc.
5. We have a lot more control over chronic pain than we think! By identifying and reducing the threats and by learning to calm the nervous system, we can effectively reduce or reverse our chronic pain.

Step 2 - Work with your provider to rule out the "3 Bigs"

1. Cancer.
2. Tissue damage from untreated infection or severe structural injuries.
3. Unmanaged rheumatic/autoimmune disease (examples):
 - a. Rheumatoid arthritis
 - b. Lupus
 - c. Ankylosing spondylitis
 - d. Psoriatic arthritis
 - e. Gouty arthritis

Step 3 - Threat assessment Use the pain matrix handout to identify all potential threats that could be triggering, causing or aggravating your pain. Circle all the items on the left and right of the handout that apply to you.

Step 4 - Calm the pain alarm using safety signaling. Safety signaling includes a variety of practices to help calm the pain alarm. In order for it to work, it has to be specific to the individual.

1. Breathing and visualization exercises
2. Heart rate variability training. HeartMath Institute is one source for learning about this biofeedback technique. Use coupon code: **DIGNITY** for a 30% discount on their programs at www.heartmath.org. (La Clinica isn't affiliated with this organization.)
3. Movement safe pain - a technique used by physical therapists to help people to improve mobility by realizing that "hurt does not equal harm."
4. Acupuncture and massage
5. Reframing and redefining thoughts and beliefs about pain.

Step 5 - Organize your pain and threat reduction strategy. Work with a provider who is trained in therapeutic pain neuroscience education to help you create a comprehensive pain reduction strategy. These are often physical therapists, medical doctors, acupuncturists, psychologists, and other health providers trained specifically in the neuroscience of pain.

Step 6 - Take action! After you have identified your potential threats and triggers, decide to make the changes in your life to reduce the burden placed on your nervous and immune (inflammation) systems that are triggering or amplifying your pain.