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ASK THE DOCTOR

A Natural Approach to Pain Relief

By Lee Perez, MD

Q: For years I have had a stiff neck that is very painful when I turn my head to look to the left or right. I've tried everything from chiropractic care to medication, and nothing seems to provide relief. Do you have any suggestions on how I can manage my chronic neck pain?

A: Chronic pain can be tremendously challenging. I had ongoing problems with joint pain and arthritis for many years. Like you, I tried everything for the pain, but without much success. Recently I found that a combination of two readily available products provides me with relief from pain. I'm willing to share with you my experiences with these products, not as a physician making medical recommendations, but as a long-time pain sufferer who has found a solution that works for me.



That said, I do want to stress that anyone with any kind of pain should be thoroughly evaluated by a physician. Once your doctor has ruled out any serious health conditions, you may wish to try this combination of topical agents as an alternative to conventional pain therapies such as anti-inflammatory medications or steroids.

A LONG HISTORY OF PAIN

Forty years ago, I suffered a fall while working in a construction job. At that time, I was told that I had arthritis throughout my spine. I was advised to become sedentary and to avoid participating in sports or strenuous exercise, but I didn't listen. Exercise is my way of dealing with stress from working long hours in an inherently stressful job and I couldn't imagine just giving it up. So I continued to exercise, doing things that were counterproductive to my problems like weight lifting and long distance running—activities that had an impact on the joints. Some years later, I developed back spasms and pain.

I tried the mainstream medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and steroids, and they helped relieve my pain. But because of their side effects, I wanted to find more holistic ways to deal with my chronic discomfort. Over-the-counter NSAIDs such as ibuprofen have been associated with gastric bleeding and ulcerations, and the next generation of these drugs known as COX-2 inhibitors (e.g., Vioxx®) have been associated with increased cardiovascular risk.^{1,2}



While these drugs do help relieve pain, I really wanted to avoid their potential side effects. But I especially wanted to avoid surgery if at all possible. I set about learning as much as I could about pain related to my specific conditions. As I got smarter, I made changes to my fitness workouts. I chose low-impact exercises such as riding a stationary bicycle and using the elliptical and rowing machines. In the past seven years, I also added yoga and Pilates to my workouts and incorporated diet and nutritional strategies, including supplements. Antioxidant supplements in particular are important, as they combat the free radicals that cause inflammation and pain. The damage that I had done years before was still there, however, and I still experienced pain.

NATURAL RELIEF 1222 PROVIDES A NATURAL APPROACH

A couple of years ago, I read an article in *Life Extension* magazine about the topical analgesic cream Natural Relief 1222, and I was intrigued. It was the type of product I was looking for, made from all-natural ingredients with no side effects, at a reasonable price. I decided to try it mainly because its mechanism of action is different from other pain relief products, and it's backed by 14 years of study by an innovative research scientist, H. Edward Troy, PhD, who himself suffered from severe arthritis pain.

Here's how the most popular topical pain relief products on the market work. They contain ingredients such as capsaicin and

menthol, which work as counter-irritants. This means that when applied to the skin, they generate a heating, cooling, or tingling sensation over a painful joint or sore muscle by causing the blood vessels of the skin to dilate. The theory is that by irritating the sensory nerve endings, any pain in the underlying muscles or joints served by the same nerves is offset or altered. Capsaicin actually has two mechanisms of action. It increases blood flow to the area and temporarily depletes nerves cells of substance P, a neuropeptide that functions as a neurotransmitter to convey pain sensations to the central nervous system. Increasing blood flow is one of the main ways the body helps to heal itself.

Natural Relief 1222, however, is not a counter-irritant. It works differently by neutralizing free radicals to reduce the inflammation that causes pain. The key antioxidant ingredients are vitamin E, a powerful fat-soluble antioxidant, and omega-3 fatty acids derived from shark oil, which are known to have anti-inflammatory properties.³⁻⁵ Also, it contains two active botanical ingredients, *Bryonia alba* 6x and *Rhus toxicodendron* 6x, that have long been used to treat joint, tendon, and muscle pains.^{6,7} Specifically of interest to you, they are also commonly used by homeopathic physicians to treat stiff, painful neck conditions. This all sounded good to me, so I tried Natural Relief 1222 and had a good response.

DMSO RELIEVES PAIN, INFLAMMATION

I had been thinking for a while about DMSO, though I had not tried it. DMSO has been called “the aspirin of our era” because of its long list of pharmacological actions that include anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and pain-relieving effects.⁸⁻¹⁰ Research by major pharmaceutical companies dating back to the 1960s has shown that DMSO is safe and effective for managing the pain associated with musculoskeletal problems such as tendonitis and osteoarthritis.^{10,11} By itself, DMSO has been shown to relieve pain.¹⁰ Its other properties—including anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects—could help mitigate the arthritic process.¹⁰

SYNERGISTIC BENEFITS OF DMSO AND NATURAL RELIEF 1222

Early researchers also noted that DMSO’s ability to penetrate tissues could make it valuable as a drug delivery system.¹² As I read about the properties of DMSO, I wondered if it could enhance the bioavailability of Natural Relief 1222’s ingredients, helping them to reach deeper levels and thus potentiate their effects. I thought it might be most helpful for joints closest to the skin such as knees, elbows, and shoulders, and possibly the spine, depending on where fat is deposited in the body. I decided to try an experiment.

First, I tried a topical application of DMSO alone, and it did have a pain-relieving effect. Then I tried it in combination with Natural Relief 1222, applying the DMSO first, then the Natural Relief 1222 cream on top of it. For me, the experiment was a success. The DMSO does appear to have a potentiating effect on the already-effective Natural Relief 1222. I continue to use the combination of the two products once a day, usually in the morning right after taking a hot shower. I haven’t felt a need to use it more often, following my general approach in medicine, which is to use as little as necessary to get the desired result, then use more if needed.

I’ve also successfully used the combination episodically, when I’ve had a specific problem. I had a case of trochanteric bursitis recently, secondary to overusing the stair-stepper machine. Trochanteric bursitis is a painful inflammation of the bursa, the protective fluid-filled sac that’s located, in this case, on a part of the upper femur. I used the DMSO and Natural Relief 1222 combination and the pain went away in 24 hours.

CONCLUSION

The combination of DMSO and Natural Relief 1222 has worked for my painful joints and arthritis. My suggestion is that you read up on both products before deciding if you want to try it.^{13,14} I personally think that the use of surgery, NSAIDs, and steroids by mainstream pain doctors or neurologists doesn’t emphasize enough that the body has a tremendous capacity to heal itself, given time. I also believe that mainstream drugs and surgery are sometimes indicated and can have great results. But sometimes patients who have surgery end up worse off than they were before surgery, and those who take NSAIDs or steroids can experience side effects. For me, DMSO and Natural Relief 1222 have successfully addressed my pain without adverse side effects.

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If you’re engaged in athletic activities and repeatedly experience injuries of the same nature or location, consider analyzing how you perform the activity.

The biomechanical aspects of any type of repetitive movement should be evaluated to see if using more correct form could help you to avoid injuries.



for those seeking optimal health.

If you have any questions on the scientific content of this article, please call a Life Extension Health Advisor at 1-800-226-2370.

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