

Using NLP to... help with pain

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

According to a 2008 report from the Chief Medical Officer for Health in England, 7.8 million people in the UK endure chronic pain. Quite apart from the cost of pain relief prescriptions and over the counter medication, around 25 per cent lose their jobs, 49 per cent develop depression and 16 per cent feel such pain they sometimes feel suicidal.

With NLP, we are familiar with the concept of getting into a resourceful state. Unfortunately, pain can make us forget about all the resources we have just when we could use them most.

I have had a chronic pain condition for over a decade. It still flares up occasionally but I am healthier than I have ever been. When prepared, I can minimise its effects by taking extra good care of myself (exercising, eating well, getting more than enough sleep and so on) as well as ensuring I am stocked up with painkillers and Tiger Balm. I also keep a couple of small bottles of Lucozade Original on hand. While I doubt they help physically, emotionally, they remind me of being sick as a small child. There is something self-nurturing about pouring myself a drink of it every so often, when the pain is at its worst. It has become an anchor, a way of acknowledging to myself that I am not at my best and will be extra gentle with myself until it passes.

Because I have lived with this for so long, taking care of myself is almost second nature and it does not take too much to get myself into a resourceful state (remembering how bad it used to be also helps). But when other things happen, it can take me days to remember to use all my resources.

While I hope never to be too old to do cartwheels, I ought to remember to warm up properly when I have not done them in a while. Having forgotten recently, I triggered an old neck/shoulder injury. After a few nights of waking up several times thinking my head might simply roll off my shoulders in protest, I suddenly thought to rub Tiger Balm on my shoulder and neck. Within moments, I was able to think thoughts other than, 'It huuuuuurts'. Relief was quickly replaced by my reprimand: 'Why hadn't I remembered this remedy sooner?'

I hope these tips will help you remember your own resourcefulness and minimise your pain.

Create your own pain relief kit

While you are not in pain and in a resourceful state, gather the things that help when you are hurt.

Remember being told to 'rub it better' as a child? There is some evidence indicating that this alone can ease pain. For added effectiveness, Deep Relief Gel is a topical pain relief which works with a dual pain relief action by interrupting the pain signal and working on inflammation. It also minimises the need for oral painkillers so reduces the risk of side effects from pills. Deep Heat and Deep Freeze can also help.

Cold analgesia, like an ice pack or Deep Freeze, reduces the swelling of sprains and strains, and sends cold signals to the brain. These compete with pain signals so provide relief.

Thermotherapy, like a hot water bottle or bath, can help musculoskeletal aches and pains and helps heal injuries once the swelling and inflammation have decreased (if still swollen and inflamed, use an ice pack or Deep Freeze).

Deep Heat is a great way to use thermotherapy while remaining mobile. Hippocrates documented the use of heat for pain relief back in 400BC. But while he filled jugs with hot water and placed them on patients' chests (leaving them unable to do much beyond hoping the jugs would not slip and scald them), using a Deep Heat spray or patch will enable you to get on with your day. Do your own research before applying any self treatments and if the problem is not gone within two weeks of self treating, see your doctor.

I have used Tiger Balm for everything from muscle aches and headaches to mosquito bites and even period pain, and have learned to place pots of it around my home so I notice them when I need them most. It is the same with cough sweets and painkillers. Otherwise, my instinct is to curl up and feel sorry for myself.

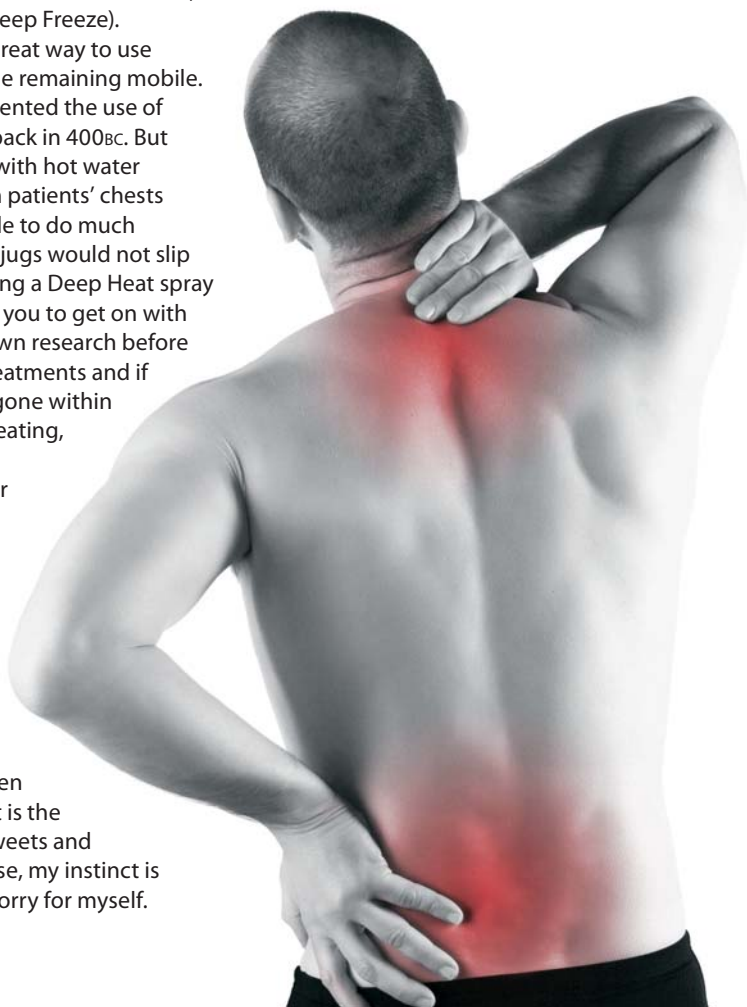
- What helps you when you are in pain?
- How can you ensure that you have what you need around you when you need it most?
- What will remind you of your pain relieving resources?

Kitchen cures

Experiment in the kitchen: chillies, oranges, bell peppers, tangerines, potatoes, corn, apricots, watermelons and plums all contain anti-inflammatory agents so can ease pain naturally.

As well as adding foods with medicinal properties into your everyday meals, think about the foods that have helped you with this pain in the past.

- What are they?
- How can you make it easier for yourself to access these foods when you might not feel up to cooking?
- Can some be pre-prepared and frozen in easy to reheat batches?



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Exercise plan

While you are *in* pain, exercise might be the last thing you want (or even are physically able) to do. But maybe you know from past experience that certain activities minimise future pain?

- Which everyday exercises or activities become even more importantly preventative when you can sense a pain flare up?
- How can you do more of these things?
- When you are not at your best, can you adapt your normal exercise routines so you are at least able to do something physical to ease your pain?

Sleep

Sleep is important at any time. Our bodies do an enormous amount of healing and regenerating while we sleep. Pain can interfere with quality sleep and even prevent it all together.

- What has helped you sleep, in spite of pain, in the past?
- What helps you get back to sleep quickly if your sleep is disturbed?
- Is your bed keeping you up at night?
- Would a new mattress or even pillows help?
- What can you do, during the day, to encourage a better night's sleep?

Meditate

As well as being something that might improve your chances of having a good night's sleep and feel more rested and refreshed while you are awake, meditation has been proven to ease pain.

Research from North Carolina in the US found that one hour's meditation training helped participants reduce pain by almost 50 per cent. The pain relieving effects were considered even greater than those of morphine!

Because meditation increases activity in the part of the brain which processes solutions while reducing activity in the part that processes pain, it is worth experimenting with some simple techniques until you find something that works for you when you need it most.

- Have you ever tried meditating in the past?
- What worked for you?
- What distracted you?
- What other types of meditating might help you more?
- Do you know anyone who swears by it? What might they recommend?

- How can you support yourself in making meditation a short, regular and effective pain relieving part of each day?

Take your mind off it

Sometimes, distracting yourself is possible. Can you remember a time when you were in a lot of pain but suddenly forgot about it because something completely took your mind off it?

- What might help you recreate this, even if only for a short while each time?
- Do certain books, films or pieces of music often manage to help you think about something else?
- Who reminds you that there is more to you than your painful condition? (I am not talking about people who deny your pain but those who encourage you to be more than it.)

Reaching out

Knowing that others are coping with the same condition can help inspire you to do more than you might otherwise think possible. As well as meeting people who understand how a lot of it feels, you can share strategies and encourage and support each other. With so many people dealing with so much pain, it is not surprising that there are some pretty unusual ways people are reaching out for help.

Betsan Corkhill runs www.stitchlinks.com, an online community for people who find pain relief for a range of conditions through crafts, especially knitting.

'I am pioneering research into these therapeutic benefits with the aim of introducing knitting and knitting groups into mainstream healthcare,' says Betsan. 'I have been running a successful knitting group at the Pain Clinic of the Royal United

Hospital in Bath since 2006 and doctors refer patients to me for knitting therapy.

'Other clinicians are interested in using knitting in this way and we're working on developing a network of therapeutic groups. I recently gave a talk at the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.

'We have identified knitting as a model craft because of the bilateral, rhythmic repetitive movements, its portability and the fact that it requires no artistic skill. It's possible that these movements are changing the brain structurally and chemically – perhaps stimulating the release of the body's natural pain relieving chemicals.

'The psychological benefits of knitting are numerous and range from raising self esteem to group participation, dealing with the huge problem of social isolation. There is also something important about being actively creative as opposed to being a passive recipient of a destructive force.

'Pain is an output of the brain. The intensity of the pain experience depends on whether, and in what context, your brain interprets the danger signals coming up from the body. If you feel low or bored or are socially isolated then this will increase your pain experience. By using knitting to deal with issues such as this, we can change the context within which pain is experienced thereby indirectly affecting the pain you feel too.' Stitchlinks are currently working with Cardiff University to analyse the effect of knitting on a number of medical conditions.

- Is there something creative (knitting; something completely different?) which helps you transcend your pain?
- Who can you be yourself with, even when you feel like you are at your worst?
- Is there a local Pain Clinic you could join to learn techniques that might help you, as well as meeting others dealing with similar issues?
- How about support groups, locally and online? ■