

POST-POLIO PAIN: CAUSES AND MANAGEMENT: Part 2

Continued from the Dec. – Jan. issue

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May 18, 2002 presentation to San Francisco Bay Area Polio Survivors meeting

Alternative treatments (use caution)

I also wanted to mention just a few of the alternative treatments that are around. With all of these, I would say "Use Caution". They are not well studied as far as risks or benefits. Logically thinking about them, certain ones have fewer risks than others. But don't make the mistake of when you hear something is a natural treatment that it's automatically safe for you because a lot of the things that occur in nature can be very destructive. Almost all our medication comes from naturally occurring substances. So if you're taking a health food supplement, it may actually be as dangerous as taking a prescription medication or more dangerous because the supplements aren't controlled by the FDA and the amount of the substance in tablets or capsules is not regulated. Be careful with those and don't over do.

Acupuncture

One of the more accepted alternative treatments would be acupuncture. Acupuncture actually can be very, very helpful and there have been a number of studies done on acupuncture. It can be very helpful for pain management. It can be very helpful for some of the tendonitis, muscular-skeletal pain.

Acupuncture is one of those things that, depending on whom you go to, you may have a completely different experience. My feeling in general is that if you are going to try acupuncture, go to an Asian-trained acupuncturist and not a western doctor that has taken a six-week course to learn where the points are because the whole theory behind medicine is totally different from Western medicine.

I don't think just taking a little piece of it and trying to apply it is helpful; it's like sticking needles in the dark. It would be like me sticking needles in a voodoo doll. You might have a Westerner that has really studied acupuncture and knows what they are doing, but it's not one of those things you really know with a little quickie course we can all take through the university now a days. So if you were really serious about trying acupuncture, I would find somebody who really has trained extensively and knows Eastern medicine.

Yoga

Yoga is one of those things that also vary. You have your strict yoga, which includes all the meditations; and then you have a lot of exercise trainers' therapists that use yoga techniques for stretching. With yoga I'm not sure it makes that much difference. We're not talking about doing

anything invasive in the body, but really more stretching techniques. And a lot of times because stretching and improving range of motion is helpful, doing yoga may be helpful.

Again, use caution. There are a lot of yoga positions that if you don't have normal joints or you have problems in a joint put way too much stress on a joint. So if you are giving yoga a try, listen to you body. If something hurts, don't do it. You might only be able to do half of the exercises the leader is doing, but that's OK. You don't have to stretch as far as the person in front. Be careful with that.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is one of those things that some people like, some people don't. It certainly can't hurt you. Biofeedback is simply using your mind to control the body. There's a lot more mind-body interaction going on than we can really identify or test for or have control of. It's an interesting area. I think if that's your bent, and especially if you are one of those typical polio type-A people, it might not be a bad idea to help yourself relax to learn some biofeedback techniques. How much of it you use is up to you, but certainly there are ways of using your mind to help take stress off muscles, relax your body, tolerate pain, and that sort of thing.

Chiropractic

Some people wouldn't even list that under alternative treatment. It's relatively conventional although not considered conventional by the medical community in this country. Chiropractic treatment can be very helpful for localized spasms, that sort of thing, but be cautious. Like with any profession, you have your chiropractors that are conservative and pay attention to a person, and then you do have your ones that really aren't very good practitioners and try to do way more than they should be doing because your muscular-skeletal system is not as strong as a person who has never had polio. Beware of letting a chiropractor work on any areas that were affected by the polio. Certainly, if you have significant osteoporosis in your spine, avoid all chiropractic treatment. The risk of the manipulation causing a fracture is too great. But for someone who has a strong spine and is experiencing a lot of soft tissue problems around the spine, it can be very helpful.

Massage therapy.

Pretty much the same guidelines apply. Again, it can be very helpful for sore muscles or muscles that are in spasms, but you don't want a masseuse who is overly aggressive. Don't use the really deep tissue massage technique unless it is in a very strong area of your body. In general, you would want more of the light massage. So again, you have to know your therapist and they have to understand you and the differences of your body as opposed to a non-polio patient they see.

Vitamins/supplements

There are a ton of vitamin, mineral, herbal supplements. I'm not going to attempt to get into all of them. I'm just going to mention a few that actually may be helpful for some of the polio-related problems. The vitamins have been well studied. Some of the other substances to a lesser extent we know a little bit about.

1. Vitamin B1, B12, Folic acid, Multivitamin

The B vitamins, especially B1, B12, folic acid, all help with nerve growth and nerve healing. Because a big part of PPS is felt to be failure motor neurons to continue to be able to supply the amount of muscle that they have been for years, it's certainly not a bad idea to take a supplement or at least make sure you're getting the minimum daily requirements of the B vitamins and folic acid in your diet.

Often this can be accomplished with a multivitamin. A multivitamin will give you your basic daily requirements.

2. Calcium, Vitamin D

The multivitamin will also have the calcium and vitamin D, which are important for the osteoporosis prevention. The vitamin D alone with the calcium is to help you absorb it better. In California nobody is vitamin D deficient because your body makes it from sun exposure. That's a problem for people in the northern climates with limited sun exposure.

3. Magnesium, Potassium

Some of the minerals important to muscle function are magnesium and potassium. Again, you'll find those in a multi-vitamin. You don't have to take them specifically. They are something that it's not common to be low in, but it can happen. Certainly if you are on a diuretic for blood pressure you can be low in potassium. That can impact muscles, really aggravate muscle cramping and that sort of thing. Have a good supply of those vitamins and minerals in your diet.

4. Coenzyme Q and Creatine

Although not studied a whole lot, Coenzyme Q has some anti-oxidant properties that seems to help with muscle tissue repair. Creatine is also one of those supplements that are used to build muscle. The results certainly have not been proven, and have not been studied to polio survivors specifically. If you are one of those people who want to take supplements just in case they might help, then Coenzyme Q and Creatine are the ones to probably put on your list because they may help.

5. Glucosamine chondroitin

The last one I want to mention is glucosamine chondroitin. Of the recent supplements you keep hearing about, this is the one that's been probably studied the most. Some very well designed studies have shown that it is helpful for more than 50% of people who take them for joint pain, maybe in the 60-70% range. That doesn't mean it rebuilds or slows the degeneration of cartilage. We don't know that. There haven't been tissue studies looking at cartilage over time. But it does seem to help with joint pain in a fair amount of people.

What I find interesting is a lot of veterinarians are starting to use it for dogs or cats with arthritis and it seems to help the animal. If it helps animals (and they don't have psychological interactions going on), there may really be something to it. Certainly it's not something that will hurt you. It's not a risky supplement to take. So for most of my patients who have any joint pain, I say at least try it.

For a fair trial you should take it for three months and then you determine whether it makes a difference or not. If it seems to do absolutely nothing, it's probably not worth spending your money. But if it does seem to help even a little bit, it may be worthwhile. It's so widely available now that it's not as expensive as when it first came out, so it may be worth a try.

D. Avoiding the "Pain Cycle"

(Pain ® inactivity ® increased weakness and loss of flexibility ® frustration and depression ® over-exertion ® increased pain ® eventual damage to relationships)

Last thing we are going to talk about is avoiding the pain cycle. Often what happens when you have pain on a regular or chronic basis is it turns into this whole cycle of *I'm in pain, Don't do any activity, then you get weaker and you lose flexibility and you lose function and now you're even more frustrated and you get depressed and then you say you're just going to do it anyway and you go out and over-exert because you are even weaker and it's easier to over-exert and you have more pain.*

And this cycle can go on and on and on, and lead to a lot of damage to your relationships with your family and your friends. You end up being like a hermit and dwelling on your pain all the time and getting more and more miserable.

Learn to accept your condition; Learn to relax; Let your feelings and needs be known; Continually problem solve - find new ways of remaining involved and active in relationships; Find a physician partner to work with you.

You have to mentally learn to accept the pain and really work at learning to control it. Learn what you can do (don't do nothing; do what you can do). Learn to rest (relax, take those breaks, don't over-push). Let the people around you know what's going on (know what you need; don't get pushed into doing things you really can't do).

On the other hand, don't complain and talk about your pain all the time or people won't want to be around you. It's always an ongoing process of problem solving - "Ok, let's try this; let's see if this will relieve that." Things change all the time in your body, so it's always a challenge to find what works and what doesn't. Remain really involved in life and be active. If you don't play golf any more, you can go with my friends, go to lunch, or do other activities. Don't give up your social life or your relationships.

From a medical perspective, find a physician who's willing to work with you and problem solve with you. None of us know everything, but if your physician's willing to do some research, to read up on things, to at least give you advice, not tell you "you do it my way or forget it; I won't treat you". I can't stand physicians that do that. It's not fair. It's your body, your ultimate decision about what you're going to do or not do, You are responsible for your health. You are the primary person responsible, but find that physician who will help you and work with you.