

By JOANNE PINEAU, HBSC.

# MANAGING PAIN

## *from a Yogic Perspective*

**Even after the body has healed itself or when there is nothing seemingly wrong with the body, we can still be in pain. Why is that?**

**Not too long ago** an older man visited my studio for the first time. His shoulders were slumped forward, his breathing shallow and his skin pale. Not what you'd expect from the president of a property management firm. "This year has been rough," he said and went on to tell me that he'd never done yoga but his wife had and she thought I could help him. Many years of 80 hour work weeks had finally taken a toll on his body. Diagnosed with fibromyalgia and put on pain medication when his back gave out, left him fragile and weak. After a series of tests on his heart and his spine, the Specialists told him there was nothing physically wrong with him.

He was in pain but they couldn't find any evidence of it in his body. It was affecting how he was breathing, his self-confidence and his ability to focus and work.

When someone experiences chronic pain, the nervous system is wound up—acting as if it needs more and more protection. It has become hypersensitive. Sometimes it's the result of an injury where a person continues to protect the area even after it's healed (fear). Sometimes, like my client, it's the result of many years of stress, where the nervous system has been on high alert, and like an electrical panel when the demand has exceeded its capacity, it has short circuited (power drain).

From a yogic perspective our body, mind and spirit are all interconnected. One affects the other so that everything we do matters including what we think, feel, eat and how we act. The good news is that we can change these things and when we do our health will improve. Following are some tips to help you handle pain:

**Slow down** - Yoga can teach you to slow down, to be more conscious in your body and in your life. Slowing down allows you to have more recognition of just where are in your life, and how your thought and behavior patterns have contributed to the situation you are now in.

**Become more aware** - Regulate your thought patterns and emotions. Note whether they are helpful or impeding to you. Challenge your thoughts. Ask yourself: "Do I really believe this?" and "What would I prefer to believe?"

**Reset your nervous system** - Pain is not an accurate indication of tissue health or tissue healing. A paper cut can be painful. With patience and compassion you can reset your nervous system to the way it was before the injury and increase your pain threshold gradually.

Ask yourself: "How dangerous is this REALLY?" Moving just a little further than your pain threshold will help to desensitize the nervous system. Move mindfully and breathe into the pain deeply and slowly. Make sure that you proceed slowly, gradually and mindfully and ask your-

self if you will regret this tomorrow; if so, you're doing too much.

**Learn to relax the body** - Deep belly breathing is the quickest way to start relaxing and unwinding the body. It sends a signal to the nervous system through the vagus nerve in the digestive tract, that everything is alright and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (the relaxation response). Make the exhale longer than the inhale. Progressively tighten and relax the different muscle groups in your body. Do it slowly and breathe while you are holding the contraction.

**Set some goals for yourself** - I once asked a young nursing student with brain cancer what she'd like to do after the chemotherapy treatments. She was thrilled with the question. It changed her mind set. Other than being free of pain, ask yourself "What will I do when I'm feeling better?"

**Practice compassion** - Appreciate your body and practice compassion for yourself and others. **[E]**



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