

the truth of your pain

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Introduction – Why am I Writing This?

Why am I writing this book? I am not an expert on pain, but I feel like I'm an expert on experiencing pain! There's a ton of information already written about pain and all of it much more well-researched, documented, studied and written by persons way more qualified than me. And it is all available to you at your library or bookstore or even easier – online. So why would I write this book? Because, while trying to understand and get to the root of my own chronic pain, I have visited so many of these websites and gathered so much information. I know how overwhelming it can be. So, I will leave the in-depth explanations of pain to the highly qualified professionals and summarize what I have found.

I hope this summary will give you a basic understanding of your own pain so that you can describe it better to your doctor while they are trying to diagnose and form a treatment plan for you. I also hope that it can open your mind up to better understanding your own body and allow you to better manage your pain.

Another goal of mine both with this book and with my blog, [The Disabled Gardener](#), is to open the discussion of alternative treatment methods for pain. I want this community of gardeners with chronic pain to examine the alternative treatments that work and what doesn't work and communicate those things to our doctors to help bring positive change to sufferers of chronic pain.

I know that you all understand that if you want to dive deeper into the subject there is plenty of information available to you out there written by highly qualified people and as always, discuss new treatments with your healthcare professional before experimenting.

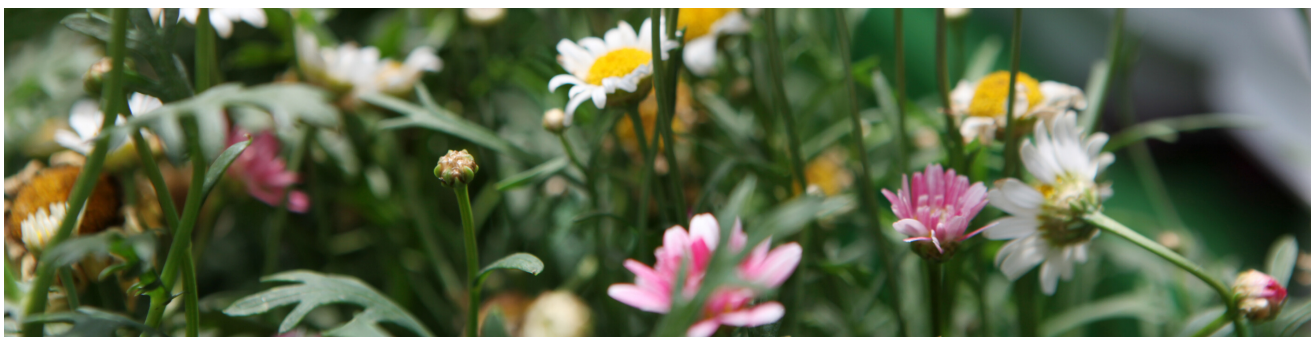
Chapter 1 - What is Pain?

What is pain? Pain is a perception. Your senses tell you what's going on outside your world. Your sense of smell is activated when you brush by your rosemary. Your sight tells you that flowers are blooming. Your sense of touch tells you the rosemary is an oily plant and your sense of hearing alerts you to the bees. These things are all external to your body. Pain lets you know what is happening inside your body.

Pain is biologically important to us for survival. It teaches us when to stop, like when we feel the heat of a hot stove. Pain teaches us the things that we shouldn't do anymore. There is no imaging or lab test that can identify or measure pain. Pain is your perception of it. Pain is an emotional experience.

Pain affects how well we are functioning physically and therefore affects our quality of life. Pain affects our vocation and our social status. Pain plays a huge role in our general well-being. And all too often, as gardeners, pain affects our recreational lives. How does pain present itself in our bodies?

Pain is labeled as acute or chronic. Acute means it has happened suddenly, and generally a pain is referred to as acute if it has lasted less than three months. Chronic pain is generally a pain that has lasted more than three months. Pain is a message that travels along neuropathways between the body and various areas of the brain. Sometimes these neuropathways can get scrambled or blocked causing a pain response.



Pain is a very complicated subject and while different vocations categorize it differently, on a very basic level, there are two main types of pain:

- **Nociceptive**
- **Neuropathic**

Nociceptive pain is the most common type of pain. It is acute and develops when nerves are triggered by inflammation, chemicals or some outside force (like when you get a thorn in your finger). This type of pain goes away once the affected area is healed.

You have nociceptors, or nerve cells, in your body that detect events like extreme hot or cold, or a thorn piercing the skin, or a pinching sensation or even chemical damage. They immediately send the message to your brain that signals pain. And you react by taking the pressure or heat or chemical away. This information helps protect and heal us. If we didn't have it and we continued to walk around on a broken ankle, we wouldn't heal.

Neuropathic pain occurs when the nervous system is damaged due to disease or injury. More commonly it is caused by diseases such as diabetes or autoimmune disease. These diseases are not neuropathic pain in themselves, but they can cause damage to the nerves that creates neuropathic pain. Diabetes does not make you have foot pain, but it can be the reason you have foot pain. Neuropathic pain is usually chronic.

You can experience both types of pain at the same time. Understanding the difference and being able to communicate what you are feeling to your doctor can help them to determine the proper treatment plan. Remember, your description is the only way your doctor can "see" your pain as there is no imaging that detects it.

You may even have overlapping pain of both types and that can add to the confusion of describing your pain. But the better you can communicate your pain to your doctor, the better they will be able to diagnose and target your treatment to alleviate your symptoms.

In this book, I will briefly discuss the types of pain relievers used by traditional medicine and alternative medicine. Again, just a very brief and un-scientific overview of these treatments. My goal is discovery and discussion of alternative treatments that have no negative consequences.

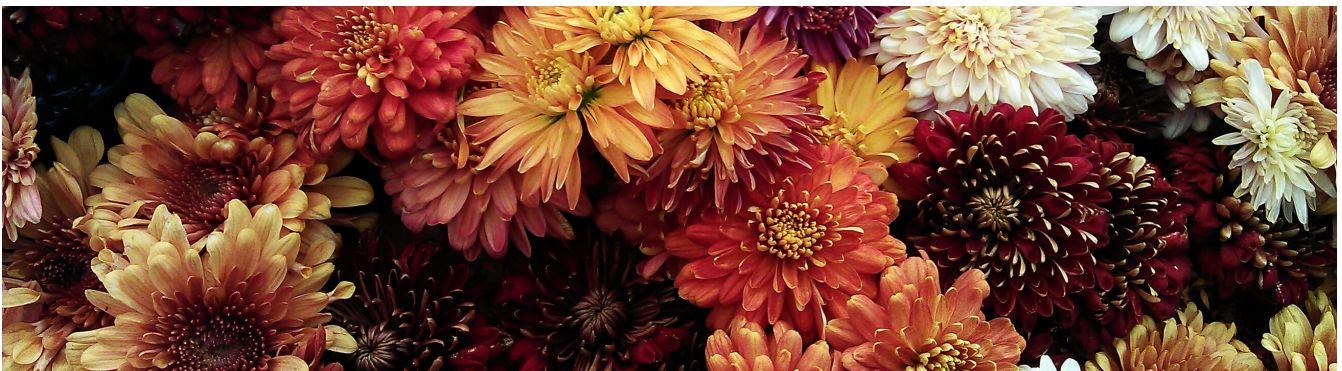
Typically, nociceptive pain has been treated by opiates, which were meant to be a very short-term treatment. Unfortunately, they are also very addictive and have only recently been recognized as a national epidemic of addiction. I think we can do better.

Neuropathic pain is typically treated with anti-depressants or anti-epileptics. These drugs can be very effective but also carry a huge list of possible side effects, and with chronic pain the outlook is not good for getting off the drugs once started.

All pain is dynamic and can fluctuate greatly, which also makes describing your pain to your doctor even more difficult. Just like when you take your car into the shop because it's making a clunking sound and it refuses to make the sound at the shop, I have found it very hard to describe pain to my doctor when the pain is not happening at that moment.

This is where a pain journal can play an important role. By keeping a pain journal, you are better able to tell your doctor where, how often and what type of pain you are having. You can journal your activity from the day that might help differentiate whether a specific activity caused the pain, or it was just a spontaneous flare-up.

But a pain journal can really mess with your mind too. So, let's talk about pain and your mind.



Chapter 2 - Manage Your Mind

Pain is an emotionally charged word.

And that emotion is a source of more pain. It's a self-perpetuating cycle that is fed by our thoughts about pain. How we feel and the message we tell ourselves each day about pain will indicate how well we are coping with pain.

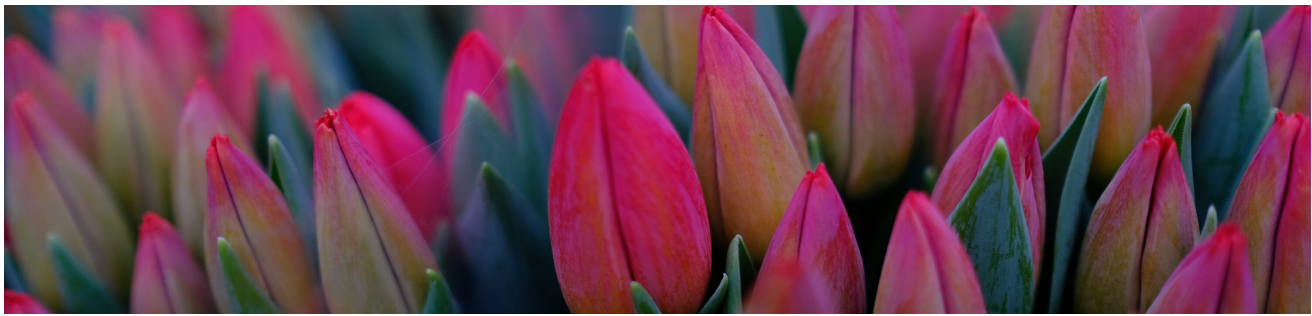
The message we are telling ourselves is why pain journaling can mess with your mind. If we are keeping a narrative journal about our pain and using emotionally charged words every day that tell us over and over how miserable we are, our pain journal becomes our autobiography. Chronic pain from overuse, injury and time, insidiously sneaks up on us and gradually changes our lifestyle. We don't see it coming. We don't batten down the hatches. We don't prepare our defenses. We are living in reaction. Generally, we spend years denying it is even a problem in our lives and we power through whatever we are trying to accomplish, ignoring our evolutionary protection mechanisms. We continue to deny the truth of our pain by gradually diminishing the effort we put in and eventually quitting those activities all together.

"I used to garden all the time", "I used to be a runner", "I used to work with my dogs", "I used to quilt" ... We don't even know when we stopped doing those activities.

When we deny the truth, we lose a piece of ourselves.

What feelings do you attach to pain? These are some common ones:

- Shame – arises when you try to hide your pain
- Blame – leaves you feeling out of control
- Weakness – you may see yourself as inadequate
- Fear – your actions are paralyzed by what you fear can happen
- Anxiety – especially social anxiety which also leads to loneliness and isolation



Are you hoarding emotions about pain? Building a wall of denial? If pain is negatively affecting your life, it's important that you the work to unearth your feelings about it.

And then you need to change them.

For example, if you are telling yourself that your pain is a sign of weakness, then you are probably trying to hide your pain from others, so they won't see your weakness. This is very common especially in strong, active women. We aren't used to feeling this vulnerability and frankly, we have things to do and don't have time for pain. But the more you try to hide it or run away from pain, the more powerful pain becomes. When you start hiding away your pain, you start checking out of life. You avoid things that will expose your "weakness". But what if you changed that thought about your pain? What if pain were to become a new part of you?

You need to live with the thought that you now have this pain, possibly chronic pain, as a part of your being. Once you can accept that it is there and that's okay, then you can work on understanding that it may change how you approach things in life, but it doesn't have to change you. You take back control of your life. You may be disabled, but you aren't unable. Pain is a circumstance that exists in your life. Your thoughts about that circumstance are what make you accept it and move on or cause the walls to start crashing down around you.

Once you figure out what your feelings are about your pain, you need to work on changing those feelings if they are negatively affecting your life. This is much easier said than done! When pain is at its height, your primitive brain wants to take over to protect you. That's when its hardest to gain control over it. Your thinking brain must have a plan in place to separate your pain from your emotion. This is hard work. But I assure you if you don't do this work, pain will rule your life. If the thought you currently have about pain does not serve you positively, then get rid of it. It's like weeding the garden and it's a chore you must keep up.

Work on these thoughts in baby steps. It's going to be a bit of a stretch to go from hiding our pain away from everyone and suffering in silence, to happily accepting this fate in life. So, try some thoughts in between as you work on accepting the circumstance of pain. Tell yourself that your pain is a result of a life fully lived and that you would not trade a single moment to take it away. Or that you are a person who is learning to accept pain as a part of life, allow yourself time to process and accept that pain is now a member of your family.

Once you have allowed yourself to accept the circumstance of pain in your life, then you can re-gain control. Just like a yoga instructor who says, "If you are a beginner, or have lower back issues, or knee issues try this instead.", you need to make modifications based on your needs. The instructor doesn't kick you out of class. And you don't kick yourself out of your life. You need to proactively make modifications based on how your body is affected by the circumstance of pain.

This is not a judgement. It is a circumstance. This is what your body is now. It will not change the goals that you want to accomplish, it will just modify how you accomplish them.

I recently took a class on scheduling and getting things done. The task for the week was to pick out a closet to clean. I picked my master bedroom closet and took my usual military drill sergeant approach to following the methods recommended to complete this task. By the end of the afternoon, I was hurting and exhausted and only about half-way through the project that I had set to complete.

This lesson in time management turned into a lesson in mind management. I wanted to wallow in my failure at accomplishing that task, but I used it instead as a tool to learn how to modify for myself. I know that I can't do the same repetitive motions for more than about 30 minutes at a time on a good day and 20 minutes on not so good days. I can still accomplish a major task, such as cleaning out the closet, but I need to adapt now and evolve. So, my scheduling might look more like 30 minutes on task, alternating with 20 minutes on a different task that involves sitting or otherwise resting.

I am not telling myself that I can't get the task done, I am simply allowing an appropriate schedule for completion based on my needs.

Be very proactive in modifications and take time to learn what your body needs. Also, there will invariably be some days that are worse than others, or flare-up days. Always have alternative tasks that can be accomplished on these days. With me, flare-ups typically don't completely prevent me from actively working, but change the type of work I'm doing depending on what is flaring. Some days I might be completely down, but even on these days I shoot for research and note taking and even practicing meditation skills. I try to always have an alternative plan so that I am always working toward achieving my goals.

The pain journal is a very effective tool for communication with yourself and your doctor. It helps you to remember what is and isn't physically possible during a flare-up and helps you know what modifications will be appropriate. It helps your doctor to diagnose you and prepare a treatment plan. Make sure your pain journal is a journal of facts and not a fictional biography of a victim.

The more succinct you are with the facts of your pain, the better you get at reporting it. Establish a rating scale for yourself and check in with each area of concern each day and throughout the day – but just like Sgt. Friday – just the facts please. If you are also using a narrative along with your scale, be as precise as possible. “Lower back starting to give out” is less precise than “lower back muscle weakness causing cramping upon getting in and out of chair”. I also like to include a brief statement of activities to help me pinpoint what might be triggering a worsening of symptoms. It can be helpful to document types of foods eaten also, not only for people with gut pain, but you might be surprised to find a connection between a food and say, joint pain.

Use words such as burning, tingling, throbbing, etc. just be consistent. Use one word for one type of pain and try to stick with that word so you always know what it means to you. Mild, moderate and severe are less emotionally charged than horrible, excruciating and agonizing.

There are apps available for your smart phone that can help you track pain. I have tried a few but find the flexibility of the written word better for me. The very good thing about an app is that it limits you to the facts, but they are harder to use if you have several different types of pains in several different areas that also vary widely throughout the day. I think an app would be particularly useful if you were documenting one area such as a knee after surgery. Another thing I do like about an app is it usually gives you a composite number for your pain each day, which is a useful tool.

Now let's talk about different treatments for pain.

Chapter 3 - Treatment

There are many medications used to treat pain. I will leave the discussion of prescription medications between you and your doctor and focus only on internal and external alternative treatments. But first I want to mention healing vs. masking.

Most pain medications are masking our pain. With our current technology, arthritis and a lot of other chronic conditions are not heal-able conditions. Your doctor doesn't prescribe a round of medication and, voila, you are healed. So, we are left with needing to manage the symptoms and reducing exacerbation.

When we take Ibuprofen, we are masking the symptom of pain. We are basically tricking our brains into not noticing the pain. There are many levels of masking that range from simply distracting you from thinking about pain, to completely anesthetizing you so you feel nothing. Doctors have their toolbox of prescription medications, and will generally start with the most conservative i.e., least intrusive with least side effects, and work their way up based on your needs. These drugs are FDA approved and have been tested and deemed safe but are not without some serious consequences on your body. Your doctor will consider this cost to your body vs. the benefit the drug provides. But there are alternative, more natural methods. Their effectiveness has not been studied as much and work for some and not others.

Your doctor doesn't have time and is not more than nominally aware of some of these methods. Many of them stem from ancient medicine practices and have been used for eons to deal with chronic conditions. Some argue that these methods were used when there was nothing better and now, we have much better, more powerful technology. But unfortunately, the side-effects of these powerful drugs can be devastating to peoples' lives.

It takes courage to go against the norm. But when the norm is not providing effective long-term relief and is leading to addiction, it's adding to the problem rather than helping. It's time

o do something else, and if the doctors can't tell you what that something else is, you are going to have to be the one to figure it out.

I am by no means anti prescription drug. We have all experienced the miracles prescription drugs can perform either in ours or our loved one's lives. Prescription drugs have an important role that will never be usurped in modern medicine, but in the case of chronic pain, drugs that are appropriate for surgery become inappropriate for everyday maintenance.

So, I want to present some alternative methods. By no means a complete list, I will briefly discuss each. I'll delve into each method more completely in future blog posts and hope you join me in trying out different methods and reporting the results or lack of results.

Also, I want to mention that while prescription medications simply mask pain, some of these alternative methods can help improve the condition. I'm not saying it will heal your arthritis or other chronic condition, but it can lessen the severity and frequency of the flare-ups.

Of course, you must talk to your doctor about any experimentation. Don't suddenly stop taking any of your medications. Your doctor needs to know what you are doing. Even with herbal treatments there could be drug interaction complications.

We are the laboratory for alternative treatments. Let's communicate with our doctor so that our voices can be heard in the medical community. Let them know whatever alternative treatment we have found that is helping us and that it's important to chronic pain sufferers.

The more doctors and insurance companies understand about how these treatments are helping our symptoms, the more accepted they will be as mainstream treatments.

Chapter 4 - Things you can Take

Sometimes chronic pain becomes acute pain. You have a flare up for reasons unknown to you. Or you have a flare up because you have accidentally injured yourself. Sometimes you have a flare up because you had to do something unavoidable that you know will likely cause a flare up. For some people their daily jobs can be a source of this kind of flare up.

Every Friday I have the joy of babysitting my triplet two-year old grandchildren. I wouldn't give this up for anything in the world! But I also know that it is going to require some baby lifting and carrying them up and back down the stairs at nap time. This is unavoidable right now. Eventually they will be able to walk up and down the stairs by themselves at nap time. But for now, it's three trips up and down with 20+ pounds on my hip. I take my time and step carefully and try to distribute their weight carefully. But all precautions aside, by the time I get home, I need some immediate relief. But what do you turn to when you don't want to grab a prescription medication?

My goal is to find treatments that first and foremost, work, but secondly, that do not have a net negative effect on my mind or body. Alcohol is one, for instance, that I have been known to turn to for relief of muscle spasms. While alcohol has a definite relaxing effect that is quick, legal and relatively cheap, it can leave me feeling not so great the next day and has a toxic effect on the liver and contributes to dehydration and sleeplessness. It doesn't do me much good to treat the pain in the moment, only to have a whole crop of problems later.



Some immediately effective alternative treatments that you consume or apply are:

- CBD Oil
- Topical Gels and Creams
- Heat, Ice and Rest and Essential Oils
- Kratom

CBD Oil is a hot topic right now! I'll bet you are seeing it in products everywhere and it can be very confusing. Do I take it orally or topically? Is it even legal? As a matter of fact, CBD oil is such a huge hot topic that my next eBook will cover the subject in depth. But for now, I will tell you that yes, it is legal. The 2018 United States Farm bill passed by congress made growing and processing hemp plants legal in all 50 states. What is hemp? I thought CBD was marijuana? Basically, the hemp and marijuana plants started as the same plant. Farmers over time have selectively bred the plant for their end purpose. THC is the hallucinogenic compound in marijuana. Farmers who valued the high THC content for their end user developed their plants for high THC content. Farmers who valued the plant for its fiber content developed it for no THC content. That's the difference between hemp and marijuana. To be legally grown in the US under the Farm bill as hemp, the plant must have less than .3% THC content, otherwise it is considered marijuana and the entire crop is destroyed. CBD oil is derived from the hemp plant, not marijuana so, therefore, has a THC content of less than .3%.

So that explains where it comes from, what does it do and why is it the next great thing? Just as your nervous system has receptors that respond to pain and send messages to the brain, you also have cannabinoid receptors. These receptors are part of the brain's endocannabinoid system, which operates as a mechanism that modulates things such as sleep, anxiety and cognition.

CBD oil is showing great promise in the areas of pain reduction, sleep problems, nerve ending problems, anxiety and stomach issues. Not only does it help relieve symptoms causing pain, but it promotes healing.

Our bodies produce things like serotonin, dopamine, cannabinoids and other hormones that help keep a healthy balance. Like depression and anxiety when you sometimes need extra serotonin and/or dopamine, you can become depleted of cannabinoids and need doses of them to help promote homeostasis. Researchers are theorizing that good health is dependent on the balance of endocannabinoids and a deficiency can lead to a variety of immune and nervous system diseases.

This is where CBD oil comes in. There is also another factor in the hemp plant that becomes very useful to the body and these are called terpenes. There are hundreds of terpenes identified as useful to the body. Terpenes are found in the oils of plants and play many roles including secreting aromas. These aromas communicate messages to the brain regulating emotions, stress, reactions, etc. When you see a CBD, product advertised as full-spectrum, they are saying it contains CBD oil and a full-range of terpenes.

CBD oil comes in a bewildering array of products from oral supplements to skin creams to additives in water and bath bombs. My next eBook will take a deeper look into these products and help guide you to finding the product right for you.

In summary CBD oil is a very promising oral or topical treatment that is bursting on the scenes right now and is useful as a tool in helping alleviate your pain, anxiety about your pain and sleeplessness caused by pain. CBD oil can give you both immediate relief and long-term positive results.



Topical Creams and Gels fall under the category of immediate relief and many people swear by their favorite topical. There are emu creams and CBD oil creams. Emu oil contains fatty acids that can reduce swelling and pain. CBD oil creams deliver pain relieving CBD oil right to the source without you having to digest it. The same is true with Diclofenac cream which is a prescription NSAID in a cream. I include it here with the alternatives because it bypasses the gastric problems of taking pills. These creams work almost on contact, but the effects tend not to be long-lasting. However, sometimes in the pain game, taking the edge off with a topical can go a long way to calming down a flare up.

Heat, Ice, Rest and Essential Oils hardly seem like they need mentioning here as they are common sense mostly. When you've had a day of pushing your body to its limits, you know you need to rest. And alternatively applying heat pads and ice packs can help reduce inflammation. If you have access to a hot tub, a twenty-minute soak can go a long way towards healing. Indulge and pamper yourself for a few hours in the evening and let your body recuperate for the next day. Essential Oils also contain terpenes that are critical to putting the brain in the right space for healing.

I mention **Kratom**, not as a recommendation but as an opening for discussion. The kratom tree is related to coffee and has opioid and stimulant properties. It is grown tropically and has been used in traditional medicine for centuries. Kratom is illegal in a handful of states, so if you are interested check out the laws in your state first. It is legal in my state and I have used it. I tread lightly with this one because there is a lot of controversy over whether it is addictive or not. The FDA has said that there is no evidence that it is either safe or effective to treat any condition with kratom. The main reason I tread lightly is that Kratom is psychotropic, in other words, it affects your mental state. When I take kratom – which is only in extreme cases – the pain doesn't go away, I just don't care about it anymore. Kratom puts me in an almost euphoric state of mind but not excessively. I think it is very useful as a muscle relaxer when nothing else is working. Kratom makes your mind forget about pain. But I will only use it if I do not have to drive anywhere or have any responsibilities. You can experiment with the dosage and find one that does not create complete brain disconnect yet relaxes the muscles. There are no after-

effects such as hangover and no lingering effects otherwise. It works quickly, within five to 15 minutes of ingesting. Usually, the pain I'm experiencing will abate after a dose of kratom and a good night's rest.

If you decide to try kratom, start small and see how much you tolerate. It is not easy to come by, but you can order it online. Here is an interesting article about research done on it <https://www.mskcc.org/blog/kratom-what-research-tells-us-about-controversial-supplement>.

Kratom has been mixed with other substances and used as a recreational drug which adds to the complication surrounding this drug. There have even been overdose deaths attributed to it but usually when mixed with another drug and used in high dosages for recreational purposes. Kratom also has been used as a drug to help people coming off opioid addiction. Another thing that makes Kratom not easily obtained or taken is that it is illegal in the US to sell it for ingestion. This means it must be sold as a loose powder. You can either pack it into capsules or take it as a loose powder and trust me-that's disgusting. The taste is very bitter, and the powder is chalky. Think of the cinnamon challenge.

So, while I think Kratom has a lot of potential and would love to see more research on it, I am not recommending you take it. But I mention it here because it holds a lot of potential in the treatment of severe pain without addiction. Hopefully, it will be researched and made a legal and regulated supplement so that we can adopt it for our chronic pain toolbox.

Kratom also has a significant potential for drug interaction problems. If you are taking prescription drugs, do not take Kratom. I will do a future blog post discussing Kratom and dive into the history of this interesting drug.

The next treatments I will talk about are those that have the potential to work for long-term pain relief but need to be taken for a longer period before any results will be noticed. These cumulatively effective treatments are:

- Ayurvedic Medicine
- Collagen
- Hyaluronic Acid
- Diet
- Homeopathy

Ayurvedic Medicine is a system of alternative medicine with roots in India. Ayurveda means wisdom of life and is continued to be practiced in much of India today.

The main tenet is that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, and spirit. The goal is to promote good health, not fight disease. But treatments may be geared toward a specific health problem.

Ayurveda relies on balance and uses nature in the form of spices and herbs to help balance your body back into alignment. There are several spices being researched for their abilities as anti-inflammatories, anti-arthritis and joint tissue protectors. The main ones are Ashwagandha, Boswellia and Turmeric (Curcumin). There are some blends of these spices available at health stores and many people have found that, taken regularly, they are providing them with pain relief and long-term benefits without the negative side-effects of Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. These types of treatments need to be trialed for several months before you make up your mind whether they are helping. There are some blind studies done on some of these treatments showing favorable results. A good resource for information on these alternative treatments for arthritis is www.thepeoplespharmacy.com

There you will find some fascinating research documentation and anecdotal reports of many alternative treatments, some you have probably heard of and wondered about, but also some very unusual ones!

Collagen is another hot topic these days. What is collagen? It is a protein that is abundant in animals. There are several types of collagen but almost all of it in your body is type I, II or III. Types I and III are found in your skin, tendons, organs and bone. Type II is found in your cartilage and this is the type that we would want to replenish to help relieve pain from arthritis.

Gelatin is collagen broken into small bits. When bone broth is simmered for a very long time it is broken down into gelatin. This sort of pre-digestion makes the amino acid that forms collagen very available to your body. When taken in a pill form, the idea is that it will allow a greater concentration of usable collagen to go directly where it is needed. Studies have been inconclusive about whether taking collagen supplements helps relieve pain. No studies have shown that taking supplements will grow or repair cartilage.

Taking collagen supplements is not harmful to you and there is a lot of promising research on the horizon, so it may be something you want to experiment with. A lot of new products have come on the market. Many of them are Type I and Type III collagen and mainly help with skin and nails, but not cartilage. If you have arthritis, look for one that also has Type II collagen to help supplement your body's cartilage. I plan to trial some collagen supplements and report the results in a future blog post. Do your own research and document your results. If you find relief in taking collagen supplements, I would love to hear your experience.

Hyaluronic Acid is a pharmaceutical gel that is injected directly into the knee joint. Although a pharmaceutical, I include it as an alternative medicine because it is a natural substance made from chicken combs. Hyaluronic acid is a component of connective tissue fluid that occurs naturally in your body and helps lubricate joints. As joints wear away with age and arthritis, they lose this fluid. The idea is to supplement the knee joint with additional gel. Like many alternative treatments, the research results are mixed. Some people say it helps and others don't notice any relief. I have had one set of injections and will have another set in six months. The injections really hurt! I am not looking forward to the next round and if I don't notice a significant improvement, I will not put myself through the pain of the injections again after

that. So far, about two months after the first injections, I cannot say that I'm having any improvement. But I am still hoping that it has a cumulative effect and will help lubricate my joints long-term. Some researchers have hypothesized that the injections work best when the arthritis is not too far advanced. In testing, people with less advanced osteoarthritis noticed more improvement. This is not a DIY treatment. These injections must be done under the care of a physician.



Diet is an important factor to mention in long-term benefits because a lot of foods are particularly prone to cause inflammation. You can have food sensitivity without having an actual food allergy and the sensitivity can cause irritation and inflammation. If you suspect that a particular type of food is exacerbating your pain, it's a simple matter of eliminating that food for 30 days and then re-introducing it to see if you react negatively. It gets a lot more complicated when it is a combination of foods. I did some food testing and I did not test positive for a gluten allergy or sensitivity, however, my doctor insisted that someone with this amount of chronic pain and inflammation is experiencing a problem with gluten. For me, removing flour and sugar from my diet not only helped reduce the flare ups but had the bonus of causing me to lose weight.

Losing weight is also very important for people with arthritis. Losing excess pounds decreases the load on your joints giving them some relief. When walking you are exerting a force of 3-6 pounds on your knees. This means that for every 10 pounds you lose, you are exerting 30-60 less pounds of force on your knees with every step.

Homeopathic remedies are very controversial. The science is just not there to support that this system works. I have dabbled in homeopathy and found some things that seemed to work and others that had no effect. Probably the most common homeopathic remedies people with arthritis will be familiar with are creams formulated with Arnica. Arnica is an herb that is known to reduce swelling. If you are interested in trying it, it can't hurt you if you are not replacing your doctor's care with it and it is not very expensive to try. There is widespread information about this ancient practice of alternative medicine on the internet and in libraries and health stores. Remember that if it brings you relief from your pain, that's all that matters.

Chapter 5 - Things you can Do

There are several routes you can take to manage your own pain, including, manipulation, movement, mind-body connection, various tools and water therapy.

Manipulation including, massage, physical therapy, chiropractor, and acupuncture all require someone trained in anatomy and technique.

Massage

Many people think of massage as indulgent, but it is an excellent therapeutic tool. Touch releases oxytocin in your body. Oxytocin is a happy hormone that induces a feeling of trust. Not only does massage give you mega-doses of oxytocin, it also manipulates tissue surrounding injured and worn joints, increases circulation and relieves inflammation. Routine massage plays a huge role in pain management.



My very first massage was performed by a therapist who was on her first day back from maternity leave and had left her baby at daycare for the first time. She was very distracted and preoccupied with her thoughts! And I totally don't blame her. She was probably an excellent therapist, but she was not there for me 100% that day and as a result, I didn't go back for years. Besides thinking it was expensive and indulgent, it didn't give me much relief. Since then I have had a few more massages and have finally found a therapist I really connect with and I feel I can afford on a monthly basis. It's important to find a therapist that's a good match

and get over thoughts that it's indulgent. Massage is a wonderful tool for pain.

Physical Therapy

Physical Therapy is kind of a no-brainer on this list. But so many people go to physical therapy, get some relief and then in six months find themselves at the same spot as before. They conclude that physical therapy doesn't work. But our expectations of physical therapy are not set properly. If you are 25 years old, have a torn ACL repaired by a surgeon and you go to physical therapy afterwards, do all the things and then continue with your active life, then physical therapy has "worked". But in the case of chronic pain, physical therapy is never going to "cure" your condition. What it will do is strengthen areas that have to compensate for your worn-out areas. If you do the exercises for 6 weeks and strengthen those surrounding areas, then stop after you are done with your sessions, they are not going to stay strong. You need to continually work those areas around the injured joint to maintain the benefit. Your normal exercise routine, daily walking and gardening activities are not able to isolate the proper muscles. Get those sheets that your PT professional sends home with you out and use them!

I know this is not great news for most of us because we want the PT to perform magic. But honestly, your exercises for those specific areas probably only take about 15 minutes of your day and if you incorporate them into your daily routine, you could maintain your strength and prevent further injury.

Chiropractor

Most people these days have been to a chiropractor and the practice has become mainstream enough now that a certain number of visits per year are covered under many insurance plans. People generally go to the chiropractor when they are hurt but getting adjusted on a regular basis to maintain proper alignment is a good preventative measure. Going to the chiropractor regularly is important if you have arthritis in your spine because it helps you maintain proper joint mobility. Some chiropractors sell a subscription package that allows you to come in for adjustment as often as you want for one monthly price. This gives you the flexibility to go once a week or once a month depending on your needs at the time.

Ask your doctor, family and friends for a chiropractor recommendation. It's important that you 'shop' around and find who brings relief. There is a certain amount of art to healing and some may work better for you than others.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a form of ancient Chinese medicine that also requires a trained technician. It is a system of applying thin needles to the skin on trigger points which stimulate healing of emotional and physical pain. It helps relieve pain by stimulating the nerve and muscle cells which lead to release of endorphins, reducing inflammation and inhibits the release of factors causing inflammation.

Studies have been done that suggest acupuncture triggers stem cells helping rebuild the fascia. Remember those neuropathways that pain travels along? The tiny acupuncture needles are designed to open the energy flow along the neuropathways and stimulate healing hormones. Acupuncture is a tool that could be added on a regular basis, say monthly or quarterly to help support damaged joints, and is helpful during a flare-up.

Movement

Forms of movement that offer relief from pain include Yoga, Tai Chi, TTap and Rebounding. These are all things you can try in a class situation or in your home.



Yoga is a mind-body exercise, or an exercise that combines movement and mental focus. This is what makes it a little more mysterious to those who have not done it before. It has that woo-woo factor! Chronic pain triggers a lot of emotional response – fear, anxiety, anger....

Yoga helps by being an excellent strengthener of muscles and the mind. It also works by releasing muscle memory of pain. Yoga helps you turn chronic pain into chronic healing. There are many forms of yoga and classes that are specific to chronic pain. Look for a restorative yoga class or yoga for pain. Classes can be done in a group or you can just do an online class in the privacy of your home. Going to a class holds you more accountable and gives you an instructor who can help you with your poses and modifications. If you can't sit on the floor with pressure on a bent knee, the instructor tells you what to do instead. I know that the commute to a class is an easy excuse for me not to do it. So, exploring online classes is a better option for me.

Tai Chi

Tai Chi For great strengthening with no stress on your joints, my pain management doctor suggested I try Tai Chi. What is Tai Chi? Another mind-body exercise, it's a Chinese tradition that was originally a form of self-defense, but today is practiced as a graceful form of exercise. It involves moving in a series of slow, focused steps accompanied by deep breathing. My doctor compared it to intense Pilates-type of muscle contraction but without stress on the joints. It does what yoga does by helping to unblock the mind memory to pain, but it is even less stressful on the body than yoga. It requires a lot of discipline and is a practice that must be gradually learned.

You can also find many videos online teaching you Tai Chi, but because it is a practice I have never been exposed to, I would like to find a class with an instructor to help guide me. Why have I not done this? Because I need to get over my embarrassment of going to a class and doing something unfamiliar in front of people! I have tried to convince my husband that he needs to do this with me, and he's open to the idea, but time is a problem. If I can rope a partner into doing this experiment with me, I will be much more motivated and much less embarrassed!

A simpler form of Tai Chi is Tai Chi Chih <https://taichichih.org/>. It involves fewer movements to learn and can even be done sitting in a chair. The entire routine can be completed in 20

minutes.

T-Tapp and Rebounding

T-Tapp and Rebounding are easy, accessible forms of exercise. What is T-Tapp? It is a system designed by Teresa Tapp, an exercise physiologist and it marries physical therapy principals with a workout format. <https://www.t-tapp.com/> If you are looking for something that's easy to perform and will give you the same mind-body benefits as yoga or tai chi, this may be a solution for you.

In the 1980's NASA research showed that while running, the force on the ankles was significantly greater than the force on the neck and they discovered that if you bounced instead, it reduced the force on the feet and ankles to that of the neck. The exercise benefit of bouncing is much greater than running but with much less force exerted on the body.

Rebounding is a mini trampoline made secure. You don't have to jump. Your feet do not have to leave the surface to get the benefit of bouncing.

One company taking Rebounders to the next level is Bellicon. At www.bellicon.com you can find a wealth of information about the fitness and health benefits of rebounding.

This form of exercise has some huge advantages. It's easy, fun and I can watch gardening videos while doing it!

The con of this product is it is price. This is one for the gift wish list!

Meditation has been used to reduce pain for centuries. There are various methods of pain management that involve managing your mind around pain. The key to these methods is to interrupt the neuropathway that is telling your brain you have pain. There are several apps available to help you learn to meditate, but a few pain specific techniques are EFT and Yoga Nidra.

EFT

EFT is a psychological acupressure technique that's based on acupuncture. EFT stands for Emotional Freedom Technique. It is based on the ancient Chinese medicine principals of meridians. The meridians are channels of energy that flow throughout your body or neuropathways.

The theory of EFT is that by pressing the acupressure release points you are helping to restore these out of balance energy fields. Our emotions trigger either positive or negative shifts in hormones which can affect our physical symptoms. By using touch, we are encouraging our body to produce oxytocin which is a good feeling of social trust and helps calm the body. By repeating affirmations while tapping the release points, we are causing the creation of feel good hormones and lessening the creation of the stress hormone cortisol.

If you'd like to give EFT a try, look at Dr. Dawson Church's website, <https://www.eftuniverse.com/>. There you can find tutorials and answers to all your EFT questions. EFT is useful for all sorts of physical and emotional conditions, including depression and anxiety that usually piggy-back onto chronic pain.

A lot of research has been done on the pain mind-body connection. Dr. John Sarno has a fascinating book, *Healing Back Pain, the mind-body connection*. Dr. Sarno passed away in 2017 but he has helped countless people heal from their back pain by understanding it's emotional, rather than physical source. It's hard to believe the possibility that pain, that is so real and excruciating, could be an invention in our minds. Dr. Sarno explains why that's possible, convincingly and offers how to make it stop. He doesn't suggest your pain is not real, it's just the source that's in question. He offers the steps for relief, but you must be willing to feel your emotions. If you are experiencing chronic pain, you should give the book a read and see if you find yourself in the pages. I was stunned as I listened to Dr. Sarno and heard him "singing my life with his words".

Another doctor who devotes his life to curing emotional back pain and preventing unnecessary surgeries, is Dr. David Hanscom. Based on the mind-body connection he takes you on a detailed path to healing which can be found in his books and on his [website](#).

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra is a powerful meditation technique that is super easy to do-all you have to do is listen and sleep! You can find a yoga nidra guided program online or you can install an app on your phone. I like the app Insight Timer and if you search on yoga nidra, you will find several instructors. There's a free online program developed by VA doctors for veterans coming back from Afghanistan [here](#).

Yoga Nidra is very powerful in its ability to cause profound change with little effort. It also promotes deep, restorative sleep which is so critical in healing from chronic pain.

Tools and Water Therapy

A few simple tools you can use to mitigate pain are a Tens Unit, and Fascia Blaster.

Tens Unit (Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation unit)

Tens units use a battery-operated device to send electrical pulses to pads attached to your body. The Tens unit is available in many different models with various number of pads and at many different price ranges. The higher end models are available with prescription and provide a much higher electrical impulse.

There are two theories as to why they work to provide pain relief. One is the gate control theory that suggests that the spinal-cord acts as a sort of gate that either shuts or opens allowing the flow of pain signals to the brain to fluctuate. By stimulating the affected area with electrical impulses, the gate switches and shuts down the message of pain getting to the brain.

The second theory, the endorphin release theory, suggests that the electrical impulses stimulate the production of endorphins that block pain messages from reaching the brain.

Some people love their Tens Unit and some people hate them! They do provide relief from pain, but like a heating pad you must be hooked up to it to get the relief. Unlike a heating pad though, they are portable so you can walk (or garden) while receiving the treatment. There are newer, wireless Tens Units that use both nerve stimulation and EMS –electronic muscle stimulation. These units offer a wider range of pain relief.

Fascia Blaster

Fascia is getting a lot of attention these days. Our fascia is the very thin gelatinous layer between skin and muscle. It is all connected as one piece and is very fluid and moves around. The theory is that when we get an injury or have surgery, our fascia becomes knotted up in that area and remains knotted causing constriction to blood flow and altering your biomechanics. It's like you have something drawing you up in an area and causing you to move in a wonky way. If you leave it like that and it never gets corrected, it causes major damage. The fascia blaster is a tool developed by physical therapist Ashley Black and is designed to comb out the fascia and restore its fluidity. She has several tools to choose from depending on your needs. An added benefit beyond the fascia is increased blood flow that promotes circulation, thereby reducing inflammation and facilitating healing.

Dry Brushing is a milder form of fascia blasting increasing blood flow and circulation. Using a firm, natural-bristle brush, you brush your entire body through a process of circular strokes. Dry brushing stimulates the lymphatic system which is a major part of your immune system. Many of the nodes and ducts of the lymphatic system lie just below the skin and dry brushing regularly helps stimulate the lymph flow and helps detoxify the body. A body and face brush set is available [here](#).

Water Therapy

A method of stimulating healing and circulation using heat is the hot tub. Plan a hot tub session to coincide with days that you know you will have flare-ups. Hot tubs are lovely but can be expensive. You don't have to have circulating water to get the benefit of hot water. A regular bath will do and a soak in Epsom salts can leave you feeling rejuvenated.

There are many, many more methods of externally stimulating healing and ramping up your body's own internal healing hormones. This is a short list that I hope gives you some ideas of simple and inexpensive ways to proactively take control of your chronic pain. Let this list open the conversation about alternative treatments for you and help you to find the combination of methods that give you the most pain relief.

The goal is not to do them all, but to experiment with what you like and what you will do and add those to your routine.



Chapter 6 - Conclusion

In summary we've learned that pain is a message from our bodies. It's important that we learn to receive and interpret those messages in a way that benefits us most and keeps us doing what brings us joy – gardening.

My goal with *The Disabled Gardener* is to get you to understand the truth of your pain and open the discussion about it, with your doctors and health givers, and with each other to support our efforts to continue gardening with as little exacerbation of pain as possible.

If you are using a legal alternative method of dealing with your pain, let me hear about it. Let's talk about it so that others can try it and we can be our own community of trials.

When we are gardening, and drought comes along, we don't just let the plants die. We give them water. We nurture them.

If our plants have diseases, we find remedies to help them.

Whatever circumstance nature gives us, we react accordingly.

Maybe we whine a little but for the most part we don't just throw in the trowel! We adapt to the circumstances in order to maintain healthy plants. We use the best tools that nature has given us and when it's time for the garden to rest, we add a layer of compost and mulch and let it rest and re-build, so it comes back stronger in the spring.

We have learned that pain is a circumstance in our life and while we may not be able to control that circumstance, we can control how we react to it and how we let it affect us long-term.

Just as we learn to work with the circumstances of drought, flood, disease and lack of nutrients in our gardens, we learn to work with the circumstances of pain in the most important garden of all – the garden of our bodies.

I know that this book will be updated many times as we add complementary methods and procedures that gardeners are finding successful in their lives. I hope you will join me in this greatest of all trial gardens and help us all find solutions that nurture our bodies and allow us to grow another season.



Did you enjoy this book? You can support The Disabled Gardener by following me on Facebook or sharing my blog with your friends.



**Happy gardening,
Dina**