



EAP Connections

A newsletter for employees served by Sutter EAP

The holidays are a cheerful time to celebrate with family and friends for many, yet for some can be a very stressful time. The EAP offers the following tips to make the holidays a more joyous time of year:

What is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

Sutter EAP provides employees and eligible family members referrals to licensed, professional therapists. Our network of experienced therapists can help with personal problems that may impact your job, relationships or overall well-being.

- **There is no charge to you!**
- **Confidential!**

Call **800-477-2258** to learn more about your benefit.

1. Set Realistic Expectations

No family or relationship is perfect. You may wish that your relationships were different – you might want to feel closer to family members or even wish they were less annoying. Do your best to accept relationships as they are and focus on appreciating people for who they are. It’s not easy, but it may make your holidays more enjoyable.

2. Practice Moderation

Overindulging in food, alcohol, sweets or shopping can provide temporary satisfaction, but may result in long term strain and consequences.

3. Remember Self-Care

Maintain your personal time. It’s ok to say “No” to others if you’re asked to do more than is comfortable for you. Be kind to yourself. Remember this is your holiday, too. Pamper yourself, do things you enjoy and include some time for relaxation. Reflect on the past year and celebrate your accomplishments.

PAIN RELIEF: A MIND-BODY APPROACH

According to the National Institutes of Health, over 25 million Americans are currently living with chronic pain. That’s a number larger than diabetes, heart disease and cancer, combined.

So what treatment options are available to those of us who suffer with lower-back pain, neck aches, arthritis, or fibromyalgia, to name just a few? “Although the powerful pain drugs, opioids, may be necessary for pain management, utilizing natural alternative approaches can be a very successful addition to prescription medications,” say Janis Thibault, LMFT, Sutter EAP clinical supervisor. “Over time, opioid use can lead to dependence and in some cases addiction, the key is to work with your physician to create an effective pain treatment plan by adding the right ingredients to create a recipe that works for you.”

Continued on page 2

PAIN RELIEF

Here are eight research-backed pain relief options to use instead of, or along with, narcotic painkillers:



1. Exercise

Although working out may be the last thing on your mind when you're in pain, exercise releases endorphins – the body's natural painkillers – and many doctors say that in the long run, exercise can help. Among study participants who had experienced back pain, those who exercised had a 25 to 40 percent lower risk of having another episode within a year. Ask your doctor for an exercise routine that is right for you.

2. Massage Therapy

Massage offers more than just a few “ahhs” for those in chronic pain. By reducing stress hormones and boosting endorphins, massage delivers therapeutic benefits for everything from fibromyalgia to spinal cord pain. A study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that the benefits of massage in easing lower back pain may last for six months or longer.

3. Meditation

Whether you practice it for 10, 20, or 30 minutes, meditation is thought to relax the body so there is no longer a “fight-or-flight” response to pain. If you're not sure how to get started, there are free cell phone apps such as Headspace and Insight Timer, which can walk you through a guided meditation.

4. Acupuncture

Acupuncture is thought to rewire the brain by tapping into those areas that control our response to pain. Participants in a recent Mayo Clinic study reported that with acupuncture there was an average 50 percent reduction in pain, compared to 28 percent for standard pain treatment without acupuncture. Acupuncture is good for neck, back and shoulder pain, osteoarthritis and tension headaches.

5. Yoga

Yoga can reduce the perception of pain and the risk of conditions that often go hand-in-hand with it like depression, anxiety and fatigue. After two months of twice weekly practice, people suffering from lower back pain reported a 42 percent reduction in pain and a 46 percent reduction of depressive symptoms.

6. Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Stress and anxiety can affect how we perceive and experience pain, so it's important not to ignore pain's emotional toll. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) – also known as talk therapy – is a treatment option in which you are taught new ways of dealing with stress and the body's physical response to it. CBT has often been shown to be as good as, or better, than other pain treatments.

7. Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a technique used to enhance awareness of the physical changes associated with stress or pain, such as muscle tension, sweat gland activity, increased breathing and heart rates. Here's how it works: by becoming aware of what's going on inside your body via sensors attached to your skin, you learn to become an active participant in controlling your response to the pain.

8. Music Therapy

Could listening to tunes help with pain? Recent research shows that by reducing pain perception, music may actually lessen pain and reduce opioid requirements. Study participants exposed to music had a 70 percent higher likelihood of pain relief than unexposed participants. Music therapy can include listening to or composing music, songwriting, playing instruments, and singing.

Sutter Health EAP – We encourage you to work with your doctor to determine an effective integrated medical treatment to manage your pain.