

INNER CIRCLE INSIGHTS

Pain Relief through Awareness: “Unpacking your Pain”



It seems to be our greatest enemy and our most dogged pursuer. Pick up a magazine, log onto the internet, watch a half-hour of television and you can be assured that there will be at least one advertisement showing how you can run away, escape, end, or even “destroy” your pain. With all of these myriad interventions, are we any less in pain? Any less pursued by it? What if the answer lie somewhere else, what if pain was not our most fearsome enemy to be hunted and destroyed? Many of us have heard the old cliché that “pain is our greatest teacher”... usually reserved for emotional pain and relationships; but what if it were the answer we’ve been searching for to resolve our bodily complaints? What if pain weren’t our enemy? Wasn’t our relentless pursuer, but instead, our most trusted friend, guide and servant? Communicating to us and only “pursuing” through the best of intentions; tirelessly working to bring us back to a place of stillness and healing. With this perspective, we will introduce one of the greatest “pain-relievers” of all time; one that costs nothing, is not in a store, has no side effects and doesn’t require a physician’s prescription; instead, this “pain-reliever” has been hidden deep inside of you your whole life... and it is powerful medicine.

Firstly, I’m going to say something that might scare or anger you and that’s perfectly okay; considering that you are reading this article to help relieve your pain... pain is not a thing. True, when we place our hand over a flame, stub our toe, break a bone, etc., we feel extreme pain; but this “alarm” pain, what we in healthcare term nociceptive (pronounced no-sih-sep-tiv) pain is not the pain that is currently guiding you to want to read this article. The pain that I’m talking about is chronic pain; whether that be pain in your head, neck, back, shoulders, arms, hips, pelvis, legs, feet or hands. The pain that stays consistently and won’t seem to abate. This is the pain that I want us to start investigating and looking at differently.



Let me relay a story to help explain what I mean. After college, I had moved from New Jersey to California, in hopes of pursuing a job in physical therapy. While this was not where life took me at that point, that is a tale for another day. I had never moved before and was going through the trial and error method of packing my meager belongings, the most of which were my books. I was able to find a really large box and decided it would do well to fit ALL my books. “Why make several trips when I can make one?” I innocently thought, very proud of my brilliant reasoning. So in went my tomes of anatomy, physiology, rehabilitative practices, martial arts, fiction and myriad self-help, alternative medicine and higher consciousness reading. They all fit perfectly! Then I tried to lift the box and immediately realized my mistake as I fell to the floor sore and breathing heavily... the box must have weighed several hundred pounds!

As funny as this story seems now, it does provide an excellent analogy for my earlier statements about pain. Pain can be thought of as the box full of books; heavy, ponderous and quite unmanageable. But, if we open the box and sort through its contents, each book (sensation or feeling) itself is quite manageable and not nearly as daunting and fearful a task. As an experiment to help us understand this concept, let’s find a quiet place to lie down or sit comfortably and close our eyes. Now, let’s begin to focus on our breathing; inhaling deeply to a count of four, pausing slightly, then exhaling for another count of four. Feel the breath carrying

your tension away. Repeat this step for several breaths until you begin to feel a quiescence begin to come over you and your mind begins to quiet. What we will now do is what we in the MFR community term “body scanning”, opening our internal awareness to all that’s happening inside; begin at your head and move downwards, allowing your awareness to discover all of the areas of your body that might be stiff, tender, tense, painful, hot, cold, etc. When you have found the areas that are gaining the majority of your attention, begin to “unpack the box”. Feel all the myriad sensations that are flowing into your awareness... not just pain, but all the sensations that we pack together and call pain. Is the area hot or cold? Stiff? Tender? Sharp or dull? Tense or loose? Shooting to other areas? Allow all of these sensations to come into your awareness without analyzing or judging them. At this point, can you feel the area enough to feel it three-dimensionally? What is its shape? Begin to direct your breath into that structure; the inhale pushing against the inner walls of the structure; the exhale carrying the tension away and softening the area. How does the area feel now?



What you undoubtedly come away with from this exercise is the feeling that becoming aware of your painful areas allows those areas to soften, to hurt less. This exercise of “unpacking the box” is like any other skill, it improves with repetition. Practice this each day when you find some quiet time, or even when you are lying down to sleep. More importantly, bring this exercise with you to the treatment table. When Myofascial Release is coupled with an active participant (you!), armed with an awareness building exercise, its ability to uncover and release our obstacles to healing becomes even more profound. The therapists at Inner Circle have spent countless hours refining their own awareness and, therefore, are excellent guides for you along your own path.

Professionally Yours,
David Noonan; BA, PTA

*For an appointment please call (215) 860-3623
“The Natural Force Within Each of Us
is the Greatest Healer of Disease” – Hippocrates*