

Taking the Proper Steps with Joint Pain

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By Dr. Derek Conte

The question: "What is the best course for one to take if they have joint pain", will provoke almost as many answers as the number of people asked. The answer is: "It depends". You say, "Great, doc! That was loads of help! Glad I asked!"

Well, it's true. It is important to get a good, detailed history taken and a thorough examination done in order to determine the best place to begin. There is a wide spectrum of care available that can successfully reduce or remove joint pain, long term, if properly assessed.

Let's imagine that spectrum. First, understand that the amount of pain one is in is NOT necessarily an indication of the severity of their condition. Intense pain can very often be removed entirely with a few, or even a single, prudent adjustment in exactly the right place, which happens very frequently.

Conversely, a steady, low-grade, nagging pain can sometimes be caused by a fairly advanced arthritic condition, but again, NOT ALWAYS. It is very important not to be discouraged. Some people love to self-diagnose online. They can get themselves completely frazzled with fear because they are not trained to interpret and distinguish symptoms. That's what you pay a doctor to do.

This is why I advocate seeing a good chiropractor for any initial assessment of joint pain, from mild to severe. A chiropractor's particular skill set allows him to span both the alternative and the medical worlds extremely well. Although he is not medical, he is trained to understand both the medical and alternative/natural approaches to healthcare and make the appropriate referrals when necessary.

Let's take an in-between case: a patient has had long-term pain and there is some degeneration of the hip joint seen on X-ray. The patient has been doing very well for years with little pain under the care of his chiropractor. But now the pain is building again though the new X-rays are not significantly worse and his range of motion is still good.

This would be a good time for that patient to consult a physiatrist. A physiatrist is an MD who can deliver injections to the affected joints that contain platelets from the blood, human growth hormone and even stem cells derived from the patient's own tissues. Previously called "Prolotherapy", these doctors are now advertizing under the name "Cellular Therapy". The idea is to get the body to make new tissues to replace what has been lost by degeneration. It tends to be expensive and is not covered by insurance, though I certainly think it should be. Both chiropractors and physiatrists can help greatly at a fraction of the risk and cost of surgery.

A doctor of oriental medicine, or OM, who is trained in acupuncture and herbals is a good adjunct to care because of the ability of acupuncture to control pain. A good massage therapist can also be invaluable in giving relaxing pain relief, even long term.

Finally, if the history, examination and X-rays point to an arthritis so severe that chiropractic adjustments and other modes of care have become less effective, then it is time to see an orthopedist/neurologist for their assessment and recommendation. This referral does not mean that more conservative types of care discussed here are to be discontinued. It means that the POSSIBILITY exists for the need of a more invasive course of care. So, take it step, by step. Get a solid history and exam and allow your doctor to help and advise you!

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