



Finding the source of chronic pain key to relief

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Chronic back pain can be as debilitating to daily life as it is painful.

Regardless if the pain has been around for two weeks or two years, there are treatments that can alleviate the pain, says Liza Egbogah, a chiropractor and co-owner of the [clinic], a chiropractic health centre in Toronto that offers therapies and physical rehabilitation for people who suffer from injuries and chronic pain.



Finding the source of chronic pain key to relief. Rear view of a young male. Holding his back in pain.

Back pain can be caused by a number of reasons.

"They may have been in a car accident when they were a kid, a fall, or nothing and find out that bad backs run in their family and it could be due to bad posture," she said.

Egbogah said it can happen if a person has done a certain activity for a long period of time, like an athlete. Or it can affect people who suffer from systemic illnesses like fibromyalgia or liver disease.

There are two types of pain: acute, which is pain that you suffer after an injury; and chronic pain, which is felt over a long period of time. And, since the body is all interconnected, one pain can lead to many symptoms.

"It could be long-term headaches, chronic neck or knee pain, most people who have a chronic pain it's because of an injury, trauma or accident," she said.

Neck and back problems also lead to sleep difficulties because it's hard to find a comfortable position, she said, and lack of sleep can lead to many problems. Egbogah said the biggest changes you will see are in the person's emotions and personalities.

"It can cause people to become depressed because they're not able to do the activities that they used to," she explains.

This could include the sports or exercises they used to enjoy, socializing because the pain inhibits long periods of standing or walking. Egbogah says a lack of physical activity can make the situation worse because the person is losing out on the feel-good endorphins that come from exercise.

"A lot of chronic pain patients we have to refer to a psychologist and it could also involve seeing a neurologist as well," she said. "It's quite the process when someone is in chronic pain to figure out exactly what you can do to help them because a lot of chronic pain patients will have a lot of psychological issues as well."

Also, some people just get so consumed by the pain that they don't want to do anything or they think they've been told that they may hurt themselves further if they move around, Egbogah said.

But some activities, like walking, is actually beneficial for chronic pain.

Egbogah said one of the biggest mistakes people make is that they will feel some pain but do nothing to treat the pain and that can turn into a chronic pain. But chronic doesn't necessarily mean you are doomed to suffer forever.

"I had patients who, let's say, had a disc herniation and they come in after having pain for two years...and thought they had to live with the pain, but when you correct the root of the problem, that's when people start to get pain relief," she said.

Toronto resident Basil Brown lived with his pain for seven years before finding relief about three years ago. He said his pain was gradual and said it was caused by a combination of things, but mainly due to bad posture.

"Sitting at my desk, the stress, the sports I was playing, just general things and it progressed...I also cracked my own back every day," he said.

Since seeing Egbogah three years ago, he has found relief and is currently on a maintenance program of strengthening exercises and regular visits. But he can recall the days when it hindered his mobility and stamina.

"If I walked for more than 10 minutes my lower back would tense up.....I immediately had to sit down to take the weight off my feet," he said.

Only 20 years old at the time, the pain curtailed his socializing and love of sports.

"I would have a short span; after a half an hour of playing football and soccer I'd have to take a seat," he said.

When he ended up getting headaches he finally had enough of the pain, so he decided to see Egbogah and was surprised at the results.

"The first adjustment I had, I could feel it right away that day. It's like a repositioning of the spine. My posture totally changed after the first adjustment," he said.

While some relief was felt after the first appointment, Brown maintained a consistent therapeutic schedule for months to reach complete relief.

"I should have gone a long time ago. I'm definitely kicking myself for that because a lot of pain would have been taken care of earlier."

But the key to getting relief from pain is finding the real source of the pain.

Egbogah said people often come in with a complaint in their neck, for example, but she discovers it really comes from their back.

"Let's say you have a lower back injury and all the muscles in your low back tighten, then your upper back changes posture to compensate for that...then the neck muscles will compensate for the tight muscles in the mid-back and they tighten up," she said.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that one must simply live with it, but there are a number of ways to treat chronic back pain depending on the individual diagnosis.

After a thorough assessment, Egbogah may begin with electrical stimulation to decrease the inflammation and the muscle spasms and in turn, help with the pain relief. She may also do a lumbar adjustment or mobilization for your lower back, which helps with joints that may have been locked for a long time.

Other possible therapies may include aqua massage therapy, modality therapies such as laser and vibration therapy, and injury rehabilitation.

Depending on the severity and type of injury, a sufferer may have to come in once or for several treatments.

"Having exercises that maintain that relief is the key," she said. "It's more about pain management."

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