Meditation for Arthritis Management

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Managing the Stress of Arthritis With Meditation

The chronic pain caused by osteoarthritis can lead to many deficits in the life of a person suffering from the disease. However, one of the greatest effects the pain can have is the stress and anguish it brings.

There are a few reasons why the pain and limitation of activities can be so stressful. Firstly, simply anticipating the pain you will experience throughout the day or with certain activities can be very stressful. It is unnerving to know pain is coming your way but not know exactly the level, length, and characteristic of the pain. Some days the pain is not so bad but other days can be excruciating, and this inconsistency can cause great stress.

It is also worrisome to think about whether the modality you use to cope with the pain will work and not cause any negative side effects. Many of pain-relieving medications for arthritis can result in gastritis, cardiovascular effects, and even addiction. These added factors can complicate your health and make the stress of pain management even worse.

Many activities and events in life are stressful and difficult even when a person is healthy. The pain that an arthritic sufferer experiences often amplifies the normal amount of stress they would experience from a stressful life event. Knowing how difficult a long day’s work, important test, or interview will be because of the pain and limitations of arthritis can cause great stress.

How can you not be stressed if it’s the biggest day of your life and both your knees feel like they're on fire due to arthritis in those joints? Figuring out how to combat the pain, get through the day, and hold your composure while doing so can also cause a significant strain.

The pain brought on by arthritis is stressful, but it can be even more nerve-wracking if you lack a proper support system or are surrounded in an environment lacking empathy. The fact that people don’t understand chronic pain can be disheartening and lead to distrust. Arthritic sufferers need those that are close to them to be their support and a shoulder to lean on when they are struggling.

Most of us expect our friends and family to understand and support us when we are struggling. Nothing is more stressful than to have someone you value dismiss your pain and treat it with skepticism, or even resentment. Having people around you not understand your pain can lead to a general mistrust, pessimism, and cause you to stress over how to deal with these dysfunctional relationships.

Next page: how meditation can help, and some tips for getting started.

How Meditation Can Help

Fortunately, meditation is an accessible, easy and free way to help reduce stress and manage pain. Meditation

and relaxation therapies can be a great way of breaking the cycle of focusing on your pain.

A theory supported by a recent study on meditation explains that by activating and reinforcing certain areas of the brain used in pain processing, meditation can reduce pain intensity in patients.

Studies conducted within the past 10 years have shown that meditation may be able to change the four areas of the brain involved in pain processing or emotional and behavioral regulation. Meditation also increases activity in the pain and emotion regulating areas of the brain and can help control emotional reactions to pain.

Pain is a terrible sensation but meditation helps to reassert the notion that pain does not deserve such a strong emotional reaction and helps you gain some control over it. It is thought meditation can decrease pain by simply lowering your stress level.

How Do I Meditate?

So how exactly do you meditate? Although there really is no right or wrong way to meditate, these are some general guidelines:

- **Focus:** It's important to focus on the task at hand while meditating. In this age of smartphones and tablets, it can be difficult to tune oneself into focusing one on single task for a prolonged period of time. However, during meditation attaining focus can help to shift your mind from the negative thoughts and stress that pain can cause onto a simple and relaxing task.
- **Breathing:** Breathing ties into the previous tip of focusing; paying attention to your breath is a very effective way to ensure you're focus is on the present moment. Simply focusing on putting effort into breathing in and out in a smooth and controlled manner helps.

- **Find the right environment:** Obviously it might be difficult to meditate at a rock concert or sports game. Finding the right environment where you can relax and focus on meditating is essential to achieving optimal levels of stress relief and relaxation. Everyone is different, but a quiet, dark, and cool room can help your body and mind relax and focus on meditation.
- **Control your thoughts and emotions:** It is normal to have various interrupting thoughts and emotions when trying to meditate. However, be cognizant of them and try to flush them out of your mind while steering your thoughts back to the single task at hand during meditation.

Chronic pain and arthritis can be a long, difficult battle, and for most people that fight involves both their bodies and minds. The pain of arthritis can lead to increased stress for a number of reasons; fortunately, meditation can help to reduce the burden of stress you experience with arthritis.

Although meditating might not be for everyone, and is certainly not a magical cure for arthritis, it is a relatively safe and healthy option to alleviate some of the pain and stress you experience due to the condition.

Pain is a very complex sensation that can be difficult to control, but controlling your emotions will help in dealing with the pain. Rather than letting chronic pain take over your emotional state, use meditation to relax and focus on the good things that life does have to offer.