

Wellness, Health, and Lifestyle Interconnections

There are a variety of factors that influence how our body feels and moves that are beyond the pure neuro/musculo/skeletal system. Circle the areas in your life where you would like to improve your well-being.



Nutrition - Anti-Inflammatory Diet

*The food we eat has the potential to subtly or dramatically influence one's health and overall pain level. In the absence of any dietary recommendations from your doctor, it is often worth trying an **anti-inflammatory diet** to help reduce your symptoms and optimize your body's healing potential.*

Foods to Include

- Brightly colored fresh fruits and vegetables (organic, when possible)
- Whole-grain, high fiber foods (brown rice, quinoa, wild rice, buckwheat, barley, oats, whole wheat)
- Chicken
- Fatty fish (salmon, trout, sardines, tuna)
- Dairy - in moderation
- Lean red meat (grass-fed if possible) - in moderation
- Olive oil, flaxseeds, and avocados
- Legumes (soybeans, lentils, white beans, black beans, chickpeas)
- Nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans, and Brazil nuts)
- Fresh and dried herbs
- Ginger and turmeric roots



Foods to Avoid



- Foods high in refined sugar (soda, candy, pastries)
- Processed foods and refined products (boxed foods, white bread, instant potatoes, chips)
- Trans-fats or partially hydrogenated oils
- Omega-6 fatty acid oils (corn, sunflower, and soybean oils)
- Refined carbohydrates (pasta and white rice)
- Saturated fat in animal fat
- Corn syrup and high-fructose corn syrup
- Artificial colors, sweeteners, and flavoring
- Artificial preservatives (MSG and BHT)

Self-Care Strategies for Pain Relief

Epsom salt bath

Epsom salts (Magnesium Sulfate) have several potential benefits, including relief from muscle and joint pain. You can find bags of Epsom salts at most drug or grocery stores. Try adding a cup or two (about 0.25 or 0.5 liters) of Epsom salt to warm (not hot) water in a standard-size bathtub. If your bathtub is bigger or smaller than average you may want to adjust the amount. Soak for 10 minutes (or longer). You can add in a drop or two of essential oils to deepen the pain-relieving and relaxing effects. **Epsom salts are NOT recommended for anyone with Diabetes.**



Ice/ heat – Both ice and heat can be effective pain relievers. If your injury is recent and there is swelling in the body, ice is generally best. If you experience pain from chronic muscle tension, you might prefer heat. Some people get the most relief from alternating heat and ice. To avoid injury make sure that the heat isn't uncomfortably hot and do **not** continue to apply ice after your skin has gone numb. To make a homemade ice pack, freeze a Ziploc bag with 1 cup of alcohol and 3-4 cups of water. Wrap in a dry towel (or two) before applying to the skin. To make a homemade hot pack, fill a cloth bag with dry rice or corn. Heat it in the microwave for 2-3 minutes on high. Be sure to wrap the hot pack in a dry towel (or two) before removing it from the microwave or applying to the skin.



Gentle movement and walking

Our bodies are designed to be in motion and too much sitting/ inactivity has countless negative effects on our health and well-being. Even short breaks of a minute or two of walking or light stretching can be extremely beneficial. Try setting an alarm to remind you to get up from your desk and move every 60-90 minutes.

Breathing / imagery – When our bodies are in pain, we tend to hold our breath. Overtime this can deprive our body of oxygen, tighten our neck, shoulders, and ribcage, trigger our stress response, and increase pain. Try sitting with your back supported or laying on the ground with your knees bent and your back relaxed. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Allow your chest and shoulders to soften as you feel your belly gently rise with the inhale and melt back down with the exhale. It might also help to bring to mind images of a place or a person that inspires love or relaxation. Or you can imagine that the pain is washing out of your body with every exhale.

Other Holistic Forms of Pain Relief

- Essential Oils
- Meditation
- Gentle movement – yoga, tai chi, qi gong, swimming, etc.
- Spending time in nature
- Prayer

Daily Movement

Our bodies need daily movement and activity in order to stay healthy, strong, flexible, and in balance. Several studies have also shown powerful results for the positive mental and emotional benefits of aerobic activity.

Moving your body keeps you healthy, happy, and mentally sharp!

Walking

Walking is one of the most powerful forms of exercise there is and it is a great way to start getting active again if you have not exercised in a while. Walking in nature (weather permitting) or with a friend or two can be a great way to move your body and relax your mind. In the colder months, you can find indoor spaces to walk such as art galleries, shopping malls, etc.



Aerobic Activities – For optimum health, everyone should do some form of physical activity that raises your heart-rate for 30 minutes every day. It is OK to move for 5-10 minutes multiple times a day, or you can go continuously for a full 30 minutes. Walking, biking, swimming, dancing, etc. are all great forms of aerobic exercise. Find something that you enjoy doing and you will be more likely to stick with it.

Strength Training

It is important to keep our muscles, joints, and bones strong. This can be done with traditional weight lifting exercises, or with other forms of movement such as yoga, martial arts, dancing, pilates, climbing, etc. You can always use household objects such as soup cans, water bottles, laundry baskets, etc. Try and incorporate strengthening activities 2-3 times per week.



Flexibility – Keeping our bodies flexible and supple is a great way to alleviate pain and prevent injury. Try incorporating some gentle stretching at least once a week into your daily routine at least 2-3 times per week. Yoga, pilates, martial arts, and dancing are all great flexibility building activities.

Balance and Coordination – Improving our body's ability to balance is another great way to reduce the risk of injury or falling. Try doing something that challenges your balance or your coordination 2-3 days per week. Tai chi, qi gong, yoga, dancing, martial arts, climbing, sports, etc. are all great ways to improve your balance and coordination skills.

Rest and Relaxation Time

Sometimes the body needs to take a break from the stress of activity and always being “on the go”. Carve out some time every day to sit or lay down and consciously relax body and mind. Try closing your eyes, shutting out the outside world, and deepening your awareness on your breath for 10-30 breaths and notice how rejuvenated you feel.



Stress Management

Counseling / Therapy – Dealing with chronic pain can be challenging not just for the body, but for our mental and emotional systems as well. You may benefit from having a mental health professional as part of your care team for overall mind/ body wellness. You can talk to your doctor about how to find the counselor or therapist who is right for you.

Mindfulness Practices – Learning to be more mindful or present in your life can be a powerful tool to calm the mind, reduce stress, and manage, decrease, or even eliminate pain. There are many different forms of meditation, so you might have to sample a few different techniques before finding the one that works for you. Below is a list of a few different forms of meditation that may be helpful.

- Mindfulness Meditation
- Walking Meditation
- Lovingkindness Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Zen Meditation
- Moving Meditation – yoga, tai chi, qi gong, etc.
- Diaphragmatic Breathing



Artistic Practices

Listening to or playing music, coloring, painting, dancing, singing, and other artistic pursuits all have powerful calming and stress relieving effects. Try coloring in the mandala on the back of this page and notice if you feel more calm, relaxed, and happy while you work

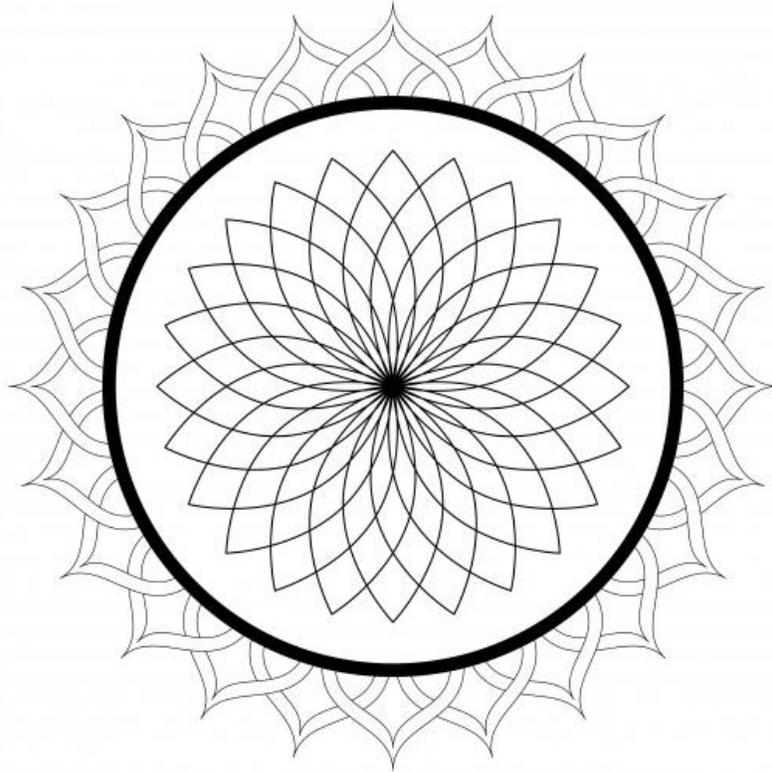
Nature

The natural world around us can be a profound source of solace and healing. Even a short walk outdoors, weather permitting, can calm or enlighten one's mood. In the Twin Cities, we are blessed with a bounty of natural resources, from city parks, to lakes, rivers, and creeks.



Community

Spending quality time with people who support you emotionally is a great way to have fun and relieve stress. Set aside time every day to connect with someone who cares about you.



Sleep Positioning

Back is Best

Sleeping on your back is the most supportive position for the body. It maintains the natural curves of the spine and reduces pressure on the shoulders and hips. It's best to use a minimal / soft pillow under your head. If your lower back gets sore with this position, try adding in a pillow or two under your knees and lower legs to reduce pressure on your back.



Side Sleeping

Habitually sleeping on your side can cause discomfort and dysfunction on the hips, pelvis, spine, shoulders, and neck. Generally it is best to sleep on your back. However, if you prefer to sleep on your side, here are some ideas on how to better support your body and reduce strain.



Needed:

- Four pillows, or three pillows and a folded towel or small blanket
- Another pillow can be substituted with a large bolster, if available

Belly Sleeping

Sleeping on your belly is the least supportive of all positions as it puts excess strain on your neck and back. If this is your preferred position, it is recommended to not use a pillow as that will further increase the strain to your neck and shoulders.

Set Up:

- Place a medium firm pillow (or a folded towel or small blanket) under your lower-back/ waist area - this will help maintain a neutral spine in order to support your lumbar spine, pelvis, and shoulders
- Place a firm pillow under your head and neck to support your cervical spine
- Place a pillow between your knees or alternatively, straighten your bottom leg and bring your top leg onto a bolster to support your knees, hips, and lower back
- Place the final pillow under your top arm to support your shoulders and neck

Sleep Hygiene

The importance of getting a good night's rest is paramount to any healing process and overall well-being. Here are a few strategies you can use to help improve the amount and the quality of sleep you get each night.

Physical Environment

Keep your bedroom **as dark as possible** to stimulate the body's production of the hormone melatonin, which regulates our sleep cycle. Shut off TV's or other light sources. Try using dark curtains or a sleep mask to heighten the effects. Keep the room temperature cool with warm, soft bedding to snuggle into.



Routine / Wind Down – Keep your sleep routine consistent, going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. Create a calm ritual before bedtime, a warm Epsom salt bath, reading, meditation, gentle stretching/ yoga, etc. Find ways of leaving your worries and cares behind as you prepare for sleep. You might find journaling, reading, meditation, etc. to be helpful in letting go of any stress from your day or worries about your future. Some find a mug of warm milk with a spoonful of cardamom or nutmeg to be soothing before bedtime. Avoid alcohol before bed as it can seem to induce sleepiness but may actually disrupt your sleep throughout the night.



Unplug

Avoid use of anything with an LED screen (TV's, computers, phones, tablets, etc) as you get closer to your bedtime. The light from those screens may interfere with your body's production of melatonin and could disrupt your sleep cycle.

Miscellaneous

Both **journaling** and **aerobic exercise** can help you sleep. Try writing down your thoughts/ worries before bed to get them out of your head. Or try writing down a list of things you are grateful for in your life. Move your body in a way that gets your heart rate up for 20-30 min every day as this can also help improve sleep.



Hydration

Drinking enough water is essential for one's health and can be a powerful way to reduce pain. Water is essential for life. Since around 60% of our body is made up of water, if we get even slightly dehydrated, our tissues will feel it! Our joints will feel stiff and achy, our back and spine can be tender and painful, headaches and neck pain will be worse, we will feel tired and sluggish, and our thinking and mood are also affected by not getting enough water in our bodies. Here are some general tips on how much water we need and how to stay better hydrated...

How Much Water Should I drink?

Do not wait until you are thirsty! In fact, if you feel thirsty, you are likely already dehydrated. The Mayo Clinic recommends that **women should drink about 11.5 cups (2.7 liters) and men should drink about 15.5 cups (3.7 liters) of fluids daily**. However, the fluids in fruits, vegetables, soups, yogurts, etc. can account for 2-3 cups of those cups depending on how many “watery” foods are in your diet.

Another way to estimate your body's water needs are to **take your body weight in pounds, divide it by 2, and that's how many ounces of water you should drink daily**. For example, if you weigh 150 lbs, you'll need to drink about 75 oz (a little over 9 cups) of water daily.

Know that if you exercise or are in a warm environment where you are sweating, you're going to need even more fluid than these recommendations.

Avoid or minimize using sodas or sports drinks for your fluid intake, as the sugar and artificial flavoring / coloring in those drinks are associated with other health problems. Stick to water (maybe add a slice of lemon or other citrus for flavor) as much as possible.



How Do I Know if I'm Hydrated?

Experts say that checking the color of your urine could be the most effective way to tell if you are well hydrated. If your urine is pale yellow, you're hydrated. If it's a darker yellow, it's time to grab a glass or two (or three!) of water.

Strategies to Drink More Water

- Keep a water bottle with you when you leave your home
- Give flavor with a slice of lemon or other citrus fruits
- Eat watery foods like berries, celery, and cucumbers
- Drink water before meals and before and after exercise

Wellness Goal Setting

Think of one small wellness goal that you would like to build into your daily life, start with something accessible (not too big of a change) that will help support your work to a healthier and body/mind/spirit

To improve my wellness I would like to try and _____

I will implement these changes, starting on _____

In the following ways _____

The challenges I foresee getting in my way are _____

I will enlist support for these changes from the following people and in the following ways _____

I will know I have met my goal when _____

On a scale of 0-10, how confident are you in your ability to achieve your goal? _____

I can

I am worth the effort

I deserve to be safe

My breath is my most powerful tool

I work towards presence in my body
I feel so I can heal

My body is a source for connection, guidance and coping

I can find choice in the present moment

I can create the condition for safety and growth

I can create balance between structure and change

I honor the path of individual recovery and growth

I work towards the possibility of effectiveness and growth in my own life



The Invitation

by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, American Indian Elder

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your hearts longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon. I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals, or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it. I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own; if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, be realistic, or to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true, I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself. if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul.

I want to know if you can be faithful and therefore trustworthy. I want to know if you can see beauty, even when it is not pretty every day, and if you can source your life from its presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure, yours or mine, and still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done for the children.

It doesn't interest me who you are, or how you came to be here- I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself, and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.