



h a r m o n y
physical therapy & wellness

Four Things You Can Start Doing NOW For Your Chronic Pain by **Sharmila Acharya, PT, CYT**

This free report is designed specifically for individuals who are proactive in regards to their chronic pain. These people are open-minded and willing to create new practices in their lives in order to help themselves. They realize that in addition to thorough medical examinations and follow-up, they need to put in time and effort to take charge of their own health.

Medical Disclaimer

The information contained here is intended solely for the general information of the reader. It is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. The information contained herein is neither intended to dictate what constitutes reasonable, appropriate, or best care for any given health issue, nor is it intended to be used as a substitute for the independent judgment of a physician for any given health issue. All content in this article is for general information purposes only. The major limitation of this article is the inability to take into account the unique circumstances that define the health issues of the patient.

Who is Sharmila and why should you listen to her?



After working in New York City's leading hospitals and private practice, **Sharmila Acharya** grew frustrated with the "factory" mentality of seeing multiple patients in limited time. She also noticed that there was a "one size fits all" approach to treatment and that the body was viewed more like a machine, without much importance given to the mental and emotional aspects. So, she decided to change to

hour-long, one on one sessions, where she could use her background as a licensed physical therapist, certified yoga teacher, John Barnes myofascial release and craniosacral therapist, and MELT Method instructor. She is able to use these therapies for a holistic approach to chronic pain and dysfunction, targeting a variety of factors and symptoms. This approach has been successful *even when traditional physical therapy has not helped*. For more information about Sharmila's background, you can go [here](#).

When you work with Sharmila, she will look at your detailed history, taking into account all of the things you have tried before and all of the factors that influence your pain and dysfunction. Then she will create a customized home program for you to do between sessions to maximize your results. True healing can occur when you are actively involved in the process.

A note from Sharmila

Chronic pain is more prevalent than cancer, diabetes, and heart disease combined! Whereas with a disease like diabetes, it is common knowledge that there are certain lifestyle changes that need to be made (like diet and exercise), there is not enough information out there on lifestyle changes to maximize results for people with chronic pain. The following is a general guideline of the top four things you can do about your chronic pain. Chronic pain is a complex subject and I've tried to simplify this information for you. It is meant as a starting point. Even if you know some of this information, the best results can be obtained when you apply these principles *consistently*. See a healthcare professional like me to learn specifics on how to go about implementing this in your particular situation. Pain is a highly individualized experience, and so everyone is different in what works best for them within the four categories mentioned below.

Four Things You Can Start Doing NOW For Your Chronic Pain

(1) Learn how chronic pain works

How you understand your pain actually affects your pain, so an important part of treatment in leading pain centers is education. All pain is real, but *the amount of pain you are experiencing does not necessarily correlate with the amount of tissue damage you have!* You can actually have pain with no tissue damage and also have tissue damage/deterioration without pain.

Information on the status of your tissues goes to the spinal cord and then the brain via nerves. The brain is constantly trying to determine if there is any threat or danger to you. So it looks at this information coming in, but it also looks at a lot of other things. With advances in technology it has been shown that there are many parts of our brain involved in our pain experience, parts that are in charge of emotions, movements, sensations, memories, etc. So pain is a *multi-dimensional* experience...then doesn't it make sense that our treatment approach should be multi-dimensional as well?

A major take home message here is that *pain is an output of the brain* ("no brain, no pain"). When your brain decides that you are under threat or in danger after looking at all the sources of information mentioned above (not just information from the tissues), then it produces pain to protect you by getting you to change your action.

This is not the sort of information that you can hear or read about once to fully grasp. It helps to keep exposing yourself to it. So, for more information, you can go to the "[Links](#)" section of my website, where I have videos and websites from different clinicians on the cutting edge of chronic pain information.

(2)[Relaxation techniques](#)

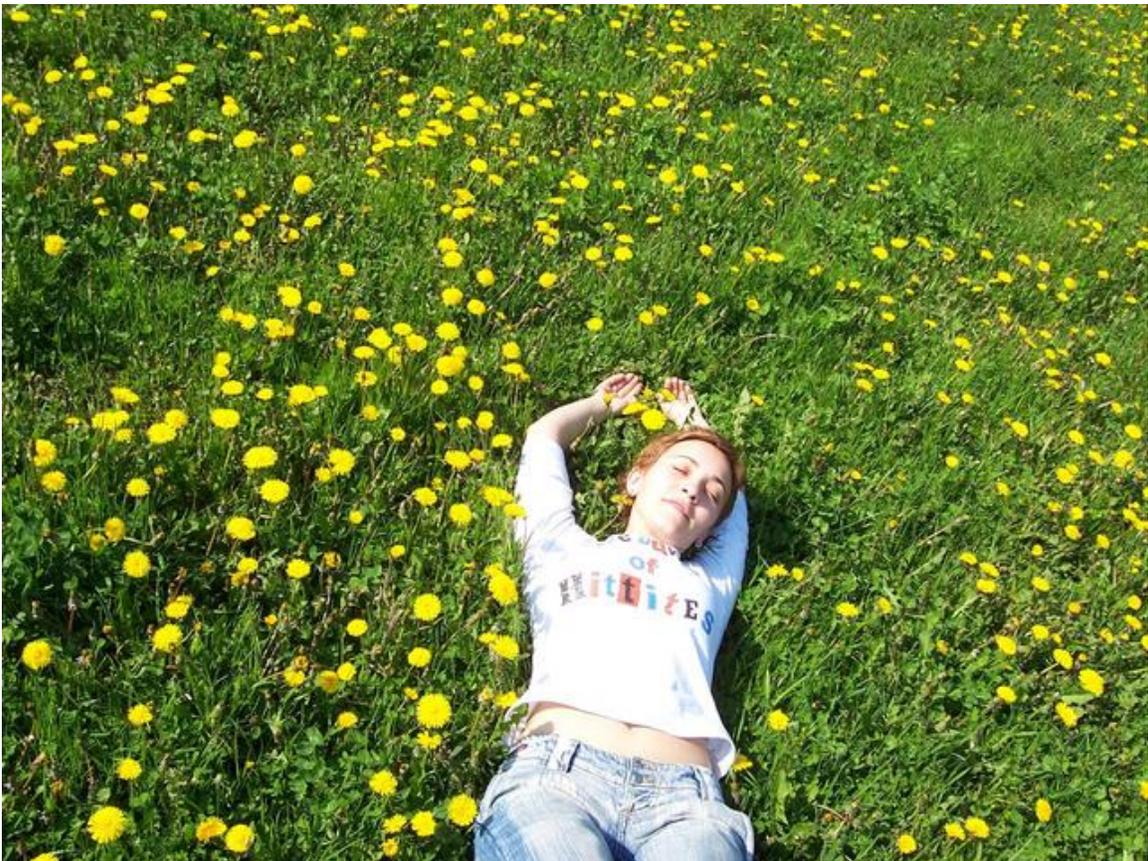
I want to clarify that by relaxation techniques, I am referring to techniques that *train your mind to be more aware of the "here and now" (the present)*. There are so many different techniques out there and what works for you is highly individualized.

You'll know if the technique is doing its job if it:

- distracts you from the pain
- promotes calmness.

In addition to these immediate benefits, there are various long-term benefits from regular consistent practice. Remember, relaxation is a skill, so like with any skill, it requires practice!

You don't have to dedicate lots of time and sit in a cross-legged position. Just find your most comfortable position in an environment with minimal distractions and try the technique for a few minutes. Try to do it throughout the day so that it will help you get by. Be consistent.



Why is it important to do relaxation techniques anyways?

Remember earlier I mentioned that your brain produces pain when it feels like you are in danger/threatened as protection? Well, along with producing pain, it activates other systems to help get you out of danger. One of those systems is the sympathetic nervous system (the “fight or flight response”).

As a result, your heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate increase and your muscles become tense, amongst other things. But this forms a vicious cycle in that it makes you more sensitized to pain, which then further activates the fight or flight response. It's like everything is "amped up" and so you may find that things that hurt you before are hurting you worse now or things that didn't hurt are starting to hurt, although there may be no change in your actual injury! So by performing relaxation techniques we are purposely calming down the sympathetic nervous system and activate the opposite, the parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest response"). There are a variety of ways to do this, from focusing on the breath, breathing exercises, repetition of a word/sound/phrase, body awareness, yoga, etc. See my accompanying audio for an idea of one type of relaxation technique.

(3) Exercise (but in the right manner)

You've probably already done this at some point or think this doesn't apply to you as you haven't moved for a long time. Maybe you are in so much pain that you just don't think you can exercise--you can barely get off the bed or couch. Well, listen up, this DOES apply to you (once you've had a thorough medical exam and been give the "ok" by your doctor). If you haven't moved for a long time, don't think of exercise as going to the gym or lifting weights. Think of it as increasing your activities. It could be things like walking, household chores, cooking, etc.

We know the body deteriorates with inactivity ("use it or lose it"), and it happens in a surprisingly short period of time. We need movement for the health of all the systems and tissues of our body. Our bodies were designed to move—in fact, a lot of us are suffering from "motion starvation". Periods of inactivity

or decreased activity just make everything weaker and stiffer so that when you do move it will be harder and maybe even hurt more! Another important reason that you need to exercise is that it releases endorphins, your body's natural pain killer. Why not take advantage of your body's natural defense against pain?



I'm not suggesting to follow the mentality "no pain, no gain". This approach may apply to people in particular situations, but it generally doesn't apply to people with chronic pain. When you completely ignore the pain and push yourself too hard, you may end up overdoing it or having a flare-up. What all of this ends up doing is making your nervous system even more sensitive (because this is perceived as a threat) and "amped

up” so that eventually you can tolerate less activity or your pain comes on even sooner.

Here is the general outline of how to approach exercise when you have chronic pain:

- Pick an activity or two that you want or need to work on
- Establish a baseline (the number of minutes you can do this activity that is relatively easy). Please note, you may still experience pain while performing this activity, as you may be in constant pain, but you know that the number of minutes and type of activity you are doing is not going to harm you in any way. Usually the baseline is much lower than you think (for example, a couple of minutes of walking).
- Systematically increase the time by a minute or two every couple of days to a week after some time of performing the activity at your baseline. It’s a good idea to time it, so you don’t end up going over the time if you are having a “good” day, which is a common trend.

Basically you are following the phrase “*start low and go slow*” or “*spacing not racing*”. You are increasing the time slowly enough that it’s not interpreted as a threat by your nervous system.

(4) Identify your NON-PHYSICAL triggers

This is often not talked about enough, but I think it is crucial. This information (as well as most of the information in this article) comes from “Explain Pain”, a phenomenal book by Dr. Lorimer Moseley and David Butler, PT, as well as “Understand Pain, Live Well Again” by Neil Pearson, PT.

Negative thoughts and emotions are powerful enough to maintain or aggravate your pain! There are some common negative thoughts that people in chronic pain experience (Moseley and Butler nicknamed them “thought viruses” and have examples in their book). Negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger are very powerful in influencing pain as well. Dr. Sean Mackey, noted pain doctor and researcher on chronic pain at Stanford, states that a lot of the areas in the brain involved in negative emotions overlap with the areas that process pain.

So this is why education about chronic pain (the first category) and relaxation techniques (the second category) are so crucial. The more that you learn about chronic pain and the things you can do about it, the less negative thoughts and emotions you will probably experience. Just make sure you go to the right sources for education and not websites that will create more fear and anxiety! This is the reason that I created the “[Links](#)” section on my website.

So now what?

“The journey of 1,000 miles is taken with one step” Lao Tzu

Take that first step by scheduling a free consultation with me by clicking [here](#), calling me at (925) 338-9297, or emailing

me at info@harmonyptwellness.com. Thanks, and I wish you well on your path to wellness!