

Pain Relief - the Alternative Methods?



I read an interesting article yesterday about the use of Ibuprofen for self-medication. Some of the experts who contributed in the article frowned upon the regular use of the drug and feel the public should be better educated about the possible extreme side effects that regular usage can induce.

I agree in some part that teaching the masses there could be ill effects from using Ibuprofen on a prolonged basis would be beneficial. However, teaching people to be cautious about drug use will only be effective if they are provided with alternatives.

I believe that people should be educated about all the options of treatment and self-treatment when it comes to pain and illness, and that is where complementary therapists can play a key role in contributing to a healthier society.

I'm not frowning on the use of drugs to control symptoms of pain and illness, not by a long shot. Drugs have their place, and I do use them as and when it feels appropriate, however, they are often overused as a quick fix solution and allow people to mask pain and inflammation rather than addressing the root causes of these issues.

The body produces pain signals as a warning sign that something is not quite right. Identifying the cause of pain or discomfort and actively seeking to remedy the cause is a much more effective way of dealing with pain than masking the signals. We as a society need to re-connect with the ability to be in tune with our bodies, and to be able to decode what these signals are telling us. In this way we will be able to effectively prevent occurrences of pain and discomfort rather than pumping our bodies with chemicals which temporarily mask the symptoms, and as a side-effect create their own problems.

Let's take the classic example of a headache. They vary in severity, and can be quite debilitating if prolonged. They can be caused by many things:

- Dehydration
- Hunger
- Tiredness
- Eye strain
- Muscle tension
- Food sensitivity
- Light sensitivity
- Lack of fresh air

A headache is a classic example of what might have us reaching for the ibuprofen, however in all of the above circumstances it would be a quick fix and often unnecessary solution. When in tune with the body, you can get in touch with the pain and work out why it is there, leading you to take a nap, stretch, get a massage, drink some water, grab some food, take a break from the computer etc.

I'm not suggesting these alternatives are always the right solution, or even appropriate for all circumstances, however surely it is better to instigate some of these first (for minor symptoms) to see if they will work before reaching for the drugs which carry the risk of damage to your body and in some rare cases even death.

I witnessed a classic example of 'reaching for the drugs' a few weeks back. I had a friend come to me complaining that she had had a headache constantly for about a week and that pain killers and anti-inflammatories were not reducing the pain she was suffering. She was starting to contemplate that she may even have a brain tumour.

I know this lady very well and knew her to have been suffering immense amounts of stress in her work and home-life, so I suggested to her that this and the accompanying muscle tension that it would create may be the root cause of her symptoms. She agreed to have a massage to see if it would help.

After one 45 minute back, neck and shoulder massage she reported that the headache had disappeared. I checked in with her about a week later and she said she had been symptom free ever since.

People are becoming more and more aware about their health, and most are taking active steps towards living a healthier lifestyle. Taking the time to listen to and understand what your body is telling you, and taking active steps towards remedying your symptoms whether through orthodox medicine or by utilising alternative methods is just another step towards better health.

Rachel Surtees