

GENTLE YOGA AS A TREATMENT FOR CHRONIC PAIN

One in five Australians is living with persistent or chronic pain (chronic means experienced for more than 3 months). What we know now about pain is that all pain is produced in the brain. Damage to tissues such as bones, ligaments, muscles normally heal within 3 – 6 months. If we experience pain for longer than 6 months, it could be attributed to an over-sensitised brain and nervous system rather than tissue damage.

What does this mean? It means the brain has forgotten how to turn down the pain signals. However, the encouraging news (within the past 10 years to the best of my knowledge) is that we *can* turn down pain signals to de-sensitise the brain and nervous system, in effect re-training them. I find it fascinating then that the ancient practice of Yoga offers a holistic method of dialling down pain signals -

- Distraction
- Mindfulness (notice your thought patterns, become present)
- Gentle, safe movement
- Mantras (positive words)
- Meditation (visualisation)
- Encouraging interoception (another word for somatic - awareness of your body from the inside out)

Pre-pain killers, did yogis realise their yoga practice helped them deal with pain?

The evidence is that how you move, think and feel can be re-learned. You can train your plastic brain to create more safety to switch off pain

You may find natural pain relief through a gentle yoga practice where you move, think and feel differently and become 'present' during guided body scans to give the brain and nervous system other information apart from pain, make it feel safe, supported, soothed.

Each movement you make and experience as safe will help retrain the nervous system

The beauty and relevance of a gentle somatic yoga practice is it encourages new ways of moving that require all your mental focus with very little physical effort. In class you'll self-pace your movements, moving slowly and safely to avoid setting off the body's over-active alarm system. This encourages movement without fear.

Nerves can desensitise as your brain learns that movement isn't going to hurt

A self-paced practice supports you and how you feel in the moment; if any movement doesn't feel good, visualise the movement instead – visualising is an effective way of activating your brain, distracting it from pain signals, creating new neural pathways and dampening down the alarm system.

As a former massage therapist since 1993, I've seen my fair share of people in pain. A number of my yoga students also suffer from pain but are finding great benefit from gentle somatic yoga, unwinding years of chronic tension, stress and beginning to move more easily again with comfort and ease.

References:

Taken from <https://www.painaustralia.org.au/>

Quoted from Pain Is Really Strange by Steve Haines

This is a great 5 minute video about pain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWMKucuejls&t=1s>