

There are times when pain is beneficial. Acute pain is usually short term and useful because it alerts you to a physical problem that you need to address. But a lot of chronic pain serves no useful purpose and can be debilitating.

Pain is unique to each person. Two people injured in much the same way may experience radically different levels of discomfort and react quite differently. **Each individual's pain tolerance is the result of a variety of factors, including his or her biological, psychological and cultural makeup.**

How You Feel Pain

From the view of modern medicine, pain basically results from a series of electrical and chemical exchanges involving three major components: your peripheral nerves, spinal cord and brain.

Your peripheral nerves encompass a network of nerve fibers that branch throughout your body. Attached to some of these sensory fibers are special nerve endings called nociceptors. When nociceptors detect a harmful stimulus, they relay the pain messages – in the form of electrical impulses along a peripheral sensory nerve – to your spinal cord and brain.

When pain messages reach your brain, they arrive at the thalamus, which forwards them simultaneously to both the thinking part of your brain – the cerebral cortex, and to your brain's limbic center. **The limbic center produces the emotions that often accompany pain, such as anxiety, fear and frustration. It's at this point that you actually begin to feel pain.**

Pain comes in many forms: sharp, jabbing, throbbing, burning, stinging, tingling, nagging, dull and aching. Pain also varies from mild to severe.

Your emotional and psychological state, memory of past painful experiences, upbringing and attitude also **affect how you interpret pain messages and tolerate pain.** For example, a minor sensation that would barely register as pain, such as a dentist's probe, can actually produce exaggerated pain for someone who has never been to the dentist.

But **your emotions can also work in your favor by reducing even major pain messages.** An example is athletes who condition themselves to endure pain that would incapacitate others. In addition, if you're brought up in a home or culture that teaches "Grin and bear it," "No pain, no gain" or "Bite the bullet," you may experience less discomfort than do people who focus on their pain or are more prone to complain.

Modern medicine is our modern folk medicine which often disregards the energy world. There are many traditional folk medicines with different views. From the view of traditional Chinese medicine, invisible Qi fills and flows in the visible world. The oxygen in the body is one type of Qi. The electrical impulses along the peripheral sensory nerve to the spinal cord and brain can be explained as one type of Qi movement. **Based on the Qi theory, pain is mainly due to two reasons: Qi stagnation and Qi deficiency.** When the Qi can not flow freely through the body, it causes pain. And when there is not enough Qi to nourish the body, there can also be pain.

Pain Management

Methods for treating pain include medications; injections; mechanical therapies such as ice, heat, massage and chiropractic; nerve-related therapies such as TENS; behavior therapies such as **exercise, relaxation and stress management**; mind-body therapies such as **acupuncture and medical Qigong**.

With acute pain, it is generally easier to figure out what the physical problem is and to fix it. With chronic pain, sometime it is related to diseases and can be treated relatively easily, such as abdominal pain with diverticulitis. The goal of treatment is to manage the pain over the short term until the injury heals or to control the pain and simultaneously treat the original disease. Acupuncture and medical Qigong therapy can be complementary measures to relieve this type of pain.

Chronic pain can be pain that hangs on even after the injury has healed. Sometimes there is no identifiable physical cause or condition. There may not be any evidence of disease or damage to body tissues and many treatments don't work. Among some people, **psychological issues can play a major role in chronic pain**. Traditional Chinese medicine treats both the mind and the body. Many people suffering from various types of chronic pain turn to acupuncture, meditation and Qigong therapy, and often get great relief. **Acupuncture and medical Qigong therapy not only relieve the pain but also treat the emotional issues accompanying it.**

Management of chronic pain also requires that the patient learns how to cope with pain. It has a lot to do with attitude and lifestyle. People who can approach their condition with a positive attitude and a willingness to change their lifestyle to prevent or reduce pain triggers are often the most successful in coping with pain.

Other resources:

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>

<http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/neuro/neuro01/web3/Lauber.html>

<http://news.discovery.com/human/acupuncture-pain.htm>

References:

Mayo Clinic Family Health Book.