

Everyone experiences pain at some point but millions of Americans experience chronic pain.

Pain medicine is certainly one approach but may not be an option if it interferes with other medications. Some people can't tolerate the side effects of certain drugs. Surgery may be considered for some pain but may not be appropriate or affordable.

But those experiencing pain may have more options to treat the problem. Two of the techniques that people might consider for chronic pain include low-level laser therapy (LLLT) and deep tissue massage focusing on trigger points.

Heather Nitching of Regain Physical Therapy and Wellness in Pittsford is a licensed physical therapist who uses low-level laser therapy to relieve acute and chronic pain, reduce swelling and inflammation and break up scar tissue formed by an injury or surgery or to reduce muscle spasms or rejuvenate nerves.

"Laser treatment is appropriate for a wide range of conditions including joint replacement, trigger points, nerve damage, carpal tunnel syndrome, fibromyalgia, bursitis and tendinitis," says Nitching. "Some of the things our clients like most about laser treatment is that it is non-invasive, painless, and has no side effects. It is safe for people of all ages with a wide range of pain issues including people who have had knee or hip replacements and have metal joints."

Nitching explains that the laser looks like a small flashlight which goes through skin and multiple tissue layers, as far as two inches deep to stimulate tissue and encourage cells to function.

The laser is placed on the skin — the patient feels no discomfort. Depending upon the size of the area being treated, the process can take

Alternatives to Medication for Pain

By Lynette Loomis

"Laser treatment is appropriate for a wide range of conditions," says Heather Nitching of Regain Physical Therapy and Wellness in Pittsford



a few minutes to 10 or 15 minutes and is usually done several times a week until healing occurs. "The brief amount of time it takes for the benefits achieved make it one of the most time-efficient therapies. Many of our physical therapy clients also ask for laser treatments while other clients come in exclusively for laser therapy."

A common form of pain is neck or lower back pain that can range from irritating to a decreased range of motion to immobilizing. One focus of both laser treatment and massage therapy is the treatment of trigger points which are localized points of pain that can be caused by repetitive motion, disease, muscle overload or injury or trauma. Trigger points are tight muscles that can cause in other parts of the body (referral pain) and can cause pain in muscles even when the muscle is at rest making it difficult for a person to escape the pain.

Shawn Thompson of Vital Massage is a licensed massage therapist with offices in Bergen and Pittsford who says, "For people who do not wish to use muscle relaxants, or who have not found them to be effective, deep tissue massage therapy focusing on specific triggers points can offer relief. In a cycle, I apply pressure, then release the pressure and begin again. There are 620 potential muscle trigger points in the body. One of my clients refers to her back pain as the Appalachian Trail as she has a string of very tight muscles that not only cause her significant pain, but affect her gait and her posture."

Laser and massage therapies can be very effective, non-invasive treatments to alleviate pain. As with any treatment, you may wish to consult your physician, understand if a referral is needed, check your insurance policy to see if it is a covered service and understand your out-of-pocket costs.