



Chronic Pain and the Tension Myositis Syndrome

Patients who have non-cancer related pain for long periods of time are said to have a chronic pain state. This usually consists of chronic discomfort with decreased physical activity, poor sleep, and feelings of depression or inadequacy (our self-worth plummets because of disability). It does not matter if the pain is from the neck, the lower back, or sore muscles all over; the pattern of the chronic pain state is the same. It is also very difficult for physicians to cure. Strong pain medicine can cause addiction and tolerance to its good effects, as well as constipation, memory problems, itching, and apathy.

Emotions play an important role in the development of physical symptoms. Particularly strong emotions and subconscious fears affect our bodies in profound ways, including the development of spasm and pain in our muscles, bowel problems, neurologic symptoms, and many others. Most chronic pain patients report pain in places and ways that just do not make sense with what we know about the body. A disc between the bones of the back is blamed for pain all over the spine and legs when in reality, it should only create pain along a very specific nerve path. This puzzling behavior of chronic pain cannot be explained by conventional medical means.

Dr. John Sarno was for 30 years a professor of clinical rehabilitation medicine at the New York University Medical Center. Based on his experience, he developed a theory that the majority of chronic low back pain, neck pain, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and several other chronic pain states, are due to what he has called the Tension Myositis Syndrome (TMS). This chronic pain state is the result of inner emotional turmoil (tension) finding an outlet in physical symptoms. His contention is that this is the *normal state of affairs for human beings*, for all of us have painful emotional conflicts, frustration and rage at the way life is; the brain shunts these inner resentments through our autonomic nervous systems into physical disorders. The physical pain is in reality less than the psychological pain that would be caused by facing our inner conflicts.

Pain develops through alterations in our body's autonomic nervous system by effecting:

- 1) the blood flow to our muscles, which results in inadequate oxygen and the build up of waste products in the muscles;
- 2) changes in the actual sensation of pain nerves and brain centers (hypersensitization);
- 3) changes in our perception of pain (*any* pain is huge and unacceptable);
- 4) anticipatory pain (fear of pain causes more tension and thereby more pain).

Dr. Sarno's treatment consists of facing the fact that psychological conflicts are perpetuating the pain state. Pain medicine and surgery will not give relief because they do not go to the real root of the pain. Until the patient accepts this fact, they will not have relief of their pain, and they may never get better.

I highly recommend two books by Dr. Sarno: "Healing Back Pain" and "The Mindbody Prescription". A similar theory is espoused by Dr. Ronald Siegel in the book "Back Sense". Please read at least one of these books and then we can discuss their implications for your condition at your next visit.

Article written by Dr. Bob Denitzio. For more information, please contact the office at 302-999-0137.