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# ~ Healthy Lifestyle ~

## Studies show that working out may help reduce certain pain



Photos provided



**By Lisa Iannucci**

Edward Garafolo suffered from chronic pain for two years as a result of a herniated disc in his back. During this time, the 50-year-old was advised to sit, put some heat on it and give his back time to heal. But rest didn't help, and on top of everything, the pounds piled on from sitting around so much, which made the stress on his back even worse.

Eventually, Garafolo consulted another doctor who completely changed his treatment plan. After a few months of walking short distances and several physical therapy sessions each week, he finally started to feel a bit better. "It's going to take more time, and I'm not sure my chronic pain will ever completely go away; but for me, exercise has become a big part of my healing," said Garafolo.

"With anybody who is experiencing chronic pain -- there is going to be movement that makes the symptoms worse and some that make it better," said Justin Feldman PT, DPT, at Feldman Physical Therapy and Performance in Poughkeepsie, New York. "Our goal is to determine the difference between the two and provide them with a strategy to begin exercising with weights, resistance bands or bodyweight movement exercises."

Most importantly, Feldman urges those patients in physical therapy to continue the exercises at home. "You have to do the exercises five to six days a week, and we found that the less you go to physical therapy, the less likely you're going to do the exercises in between sessions," said Feldman.

In his book, "Do You Really Need Spine Surgery?", David Hanscom M.D. writes, "Tight muscles and joint

contractures are painful. As the injured area approaches full range of motion, your body warns you with pain signals. Becoming more protective of these tissues, your pain grows with less motion. As you decrease your level of activity, your weakened body finds it harder to support your spinal column."

To help prevent this, Dr. Hanscom suggests working toward a full range of motion for all of your painful joints with three to five hours of resistance exercises per week.

The National Institute on Aging explains that each type of exercise provides specific benefits to those in chronic pain. For example, strength exercises can help maintain or add to your muscle strength. Strong muscles support and protect joints. Endurance exercises make the heart and arteries healthier and may lessen swelling in some joints. Finally, flexibility exercises help to keep joints moving, relieve stiffness, and allow for more freedom of movement for everyday activities.

But Dr. Hanscom says that exercise is only part of chronic pain treatment.

"Chronic pain is an embedded memory, so it has to be erased," he said in an interview. "Lack of sleep, stress, all contribute to the pain. Exercise and medications all work a little, but nothing works completely. You have to take control of all of the variables that are affecting you personally, but exercise is mandatory to make progress."

This is especially important as you age. "Muscles atrophy when you get older and weight training stops and reverses it," he said.

If your joints hurt too much to walk or carry weights, consider aquatic therapy as a form of exercise to get you started.

When you step into the water, the buoyancy provides less stress on your joints and makes it less painful to move. Some physical therapy centers provide aquatic therapy, or you may find a gym that offers aquatic therapy classes. Perhaps you would prefer doing the downward dog to a water jog? If yoga is your thing, studies have also shown that yoga can reduce pain perception and have the opposite effect on the brain, as does chronic pain. There are many types of exercises to consider when trying to combat chronic pain, and it just might be as simple as finding one that's right for you and taking that first step. *--CTW Features*



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