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Drug-free treatments offer hope for older people in pain

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Mind-body therapies, which focus on the interactions between the mind, body and behavior, and the ways in which emotional, mental, social and behavioral factors can affect health, may be of particular benefit to elderly chronic pain sufferers. A new study published in *Pain Medicine* provides a structured review of eight mind-body interventions for older people, including progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, hypnosis, tai chi and yoga.

All eight treatments were found to be feasible for older adults, and no adverse events or safety issues were reported. The article finds evidence that, in particular, progressive muscle relaxation may be effective for older people with osteoarthritis pain, while meditation and tai chi appear to improve function and coping with low back pain and osteoarthritis.

Chronic pain is common among older people. Sufferers are often unable to receive adequate treatment because of limited physician training in pain management for the elderly and the increased likelihood of side effects from pain medication.

“The trials we reviewed indicated that mind–body therapies were especially well suited to the older adult with chronic pain,” concludes lead author Natalia E. Morone, M.D., MSc. “This was because of their gentle approach, which made them suitable for even the frail older adult. Additionally, their positive emphasis on self-exploration was a potential remedy for the heavy emotional, psychological and social burden that is a hallmark of chronic pain.”

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