

LIVING BETTER, LONGER

Diet, wellness and exercise are all keys to living your best life as The Villages works to become America's Healthiest Hometown. The community is home to both major players and innovative programs at the hyper-local level.



UF HEALTH

The Southeast's most comprehensive academic health center locally operates UF Health The Villages Hospital, UF Health The Villages Hospital Freestanding ER and UF Health Leesburg hospital. www.UFHealth.org



THE VILLAGES HEALTH

The network operates six primary care centers and two specialty care centers locally. It also offers hundreds of free health and wellness classes online that are both live and pre-recorded. www.TheVillagesHealth.com



THE VILLAGES GROWN

The hyper-local community food system is anchored by a 45-acre growing complex to enable farm-to-table nutrition. It also operates a retail store, online ordering and an airstream mobile market. www.TheVillagesGrown.com



THE ENRICHMENT ACADEMY

The program operates a variety of fee based extra-curriculum courses on health and wellness topics for mind, body and spirit. Residents and anyone older than age 30 may register. www.TheEnrichmentAcademy.org

SUNDAY, LOCAL COMMENTARY | MONDAY, LOCAL COLUMNISTS | TUESDAY & THURSDAY, POLITICAL OPINION | WEDNESDAY, WELLNESS ADVICE | FRIDAY, READER THOUGHTS

A VIEW FROM THE VILLAGES HEALTH

Are you managing pain or is pain managing you? If you are reading this article, you probably have been living with pain for a long time. Perhaps you have a medical condition like arthritis for which there is no cure.



Metro Creative



Lucy Rathier

COMMENTARY

You may be seeking understanding of the pain's cause only to hear from doctors that there is no medical explanation for your continued suffering. Maybe family and friends don't understand your pain experience because "you look fine" which affects your relationships. You've given up enjoyable activities because of pain. It's understandable that you would feel discouraged. Pain is managing you.

How did this happen? Let's try to better understand acute and chronic pain. We often relate pain to the severity of harm. For example, I broke my leg, therefore I have a lot of pain.

Pain acted as a signal to tell us there was damage. This is acute pain that will diminish within three months as the injury heals. Chronic pain is different. It persists beyond expected healing time and despite treatment. It may continue without good reason, i.e., there's not necessarily the danger of further damage. Chronic pain is like a broken smoke alarm that goes off even when there is not a fire.

Why does the pain signal continue if there's no further damage? Some individuals have an alarm system that's extra sensitive. It takes fewer alarm

signals to result in pain. The body is unable to restore tissue fully due to inadequate sleep so pain increases. Pain may continue because of muscle tension or deconditioning due to being sedentary. According to Debra Fulton Fiset, APRN at The Villages Health Pain Management, "People have been taught to stay off a painful joint or back when in reality the more active a person is the lower the pain level, the stronger they become, and less attention gets paid to the pain and its mental effects." Moreover, it's frustrating to have pain and fatigue set in at activity levels that once produced none. This often leads people to overdo to prove they can still do the activity. When people overexert themselves, this aggravates pain.

Chronic pain is processed in our brain's limbic system. The limbic system also processes stress, anxiety, and depression. A negative mood increases pain because the same part of the brain is activated. Moreover, the pain exacerbates the negative mood and before you know it, you're caught in a vicious cycle.

This is not to say that the pain is all in your head. We know that the pain is real. However, there

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are many pain intensifiers you can manage.

The multidisciplinary approach addresses the individual differences in pain and treatment response. This approach may include medical intervention, physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, and cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT). Research has shown significant results in improving pain symptoms and functionality from the multidisciplinary approach.

The Villages Health offers the Pain Coping Skills Program (CBT). Relaxation and mindfulness strategies are used to decrease muscle tension, reduce stress, and divert attention away from the pain. Proper activity pacing results in being more productive without pain exacerbations. Responding differently to unhelpful thoughts about pain helps to improve mood and reduce suffering. Participating Villagers have found strategies improved the quality of their lives.

If you are interested in the Pain Coping Skills Program at The Villages Health, contact Mandy Bibler at 352-674-1779 or Mandy.Bibler@thevillageshealth.com.

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