

THE ENDORPHIN PUZZLE
By Dr. Aaron P. Draper, DC
(Edited)

Pain & Endorphin

Pain is important; so important that you couldn't survive life without it. So you shouldn't be doing things to try to 'kill' it. Pain is helping you, and when you feel pain, it is trying to motivate you to change your behavior. If for example your back hurts when you bend forward, then you should not bend forward; your pain will let you know your limits. Pay attention to it, it is protecting you. If you have chronic pain, it's not because your pain system is malfunction as is commonly thought in the medical profession; it is chronic because you have a chronic problem in your body that warrants the pain. Treating your pain with drugs or other pain "killing" strategies does not treat the real problem.

A pain killing treatment that does not identify and correct the primary problem is a seduction (definition: to lead astray) and is irrational. It will only lead to future health disasters.

Your perception of pain is ultimately determined by your endorphin system. Endorphins are your body's only pain-blocking chemicals; they play a part in your pain experience 24 hours a day. They are your 'pain regulators', and are very powerful – at least 200 times more potent than morphine, which is one of the most powerful pain drugs we have.

Endorphins regulate your pain. Remember that your body is fragile and can easily be injured; if you didn't feel pain resulting from injury, you wouldn't avoid injury-producing behaviors, and would eventually overwhelm your body's reparative capacity. If a broken leg caused no pain, you would continue to walk on it, unaware of the injury, and eventually the leg would become a bloody stump.

So you must have enough pain receptors to keep you from destroying yourself, but not so many to keep you from living out in the world, surviving the environment. Obviously, you're not currently involved in "Hunt & Gather" as were humans 40,000 years ago; but when these systems evolved, you wouldn't survive if you had a 'bad back', and couldn't go out to hunt and gather.

So this is where endorphins enter the picture. They block the pain of that bad back, allowing you to go out into your environment and survive. This balance between having enough pain to keep you from destroying yourself, but not so much pain that you can't survive your environment, is playing out in your body every day.

Which is why your back may have been painful years ago, but you feel fine now; or perhaps your back just recently started to hurt again after years or months of no pain, for no apparent reason. Your back wasn't fine when it didn't hurt, it had just numbed out with endorphin; then some encroachment of muscle spasm onto a previously healthy muscle, or onto a nerve, or even a little re-injury has allowed the awareness of back pain to re-emerge. Conversely, it is important to understand that the absence of pain does not mean your 'bad back' has gone away. Your endorphins are blocking the pain ensuing from the hard, contracted musculature for the time being.

Exercise & Endorphins

You've probably heard of "runner's high", the euphoric feeling that a long distance runner may get while running; it's usually thought of as being a good thing, but it is not. (*Editor's note: "runner's high" and "being in the zone" are NOT the same thing!*) What it really means is that the runner has irritated his body enough to make the endorphin system 'think' he must be running from something that threatens his survival, so it blocks the pain; now the runner can continue the 'survival activity' with no distracting pain! Why else would he be punishing his body? Certainly not for fun, or for health!

People feel good from exercise because it is good to move, and increase circulation, and use the muscles. But there is a huge difference between that and punishing your body with so much 'exercise' that your body is filled with pain, and consequently with endorphin. Improper exercise, or too-much exercise is simply not a health-promoting activity. Any time you are producing endorphin, you are harming yourself. If you must have that morning run in order not to hurt, you are simply 'shooting up' with morphine.

Remember, pain is your body's way of motivating you to avoid a harmful behavior; but if your endorphin system interprets that your strenuous exercise is for survival purposes, it will block your pain to allow you to continue to perform, and hence to survive. This applies only to overly-excessive exercise. The primary reason for this article is to get across the way endorphins play into your pain perceptions.

Muscle Spasms & Endorphin

When a muscle is over-used, over-worked, over-exercised, or injured, muscle tone can increase to the point of muscle *spasm*. Muscle spasms have the ability to send pain signals to your brain, but before that signal reaches your cerebral cortex (that part of the brain that is conscious), it passes through another part of the brain called the amygdala, where the endorphin system resides. Here the brain 'decides' if this pain signal is necessary to keep you from damaging yourself ~ OR, would this pain be distracting from your survival activity? Then it either lets the pain signal through to your conscious brain, or it doesn't.

This means you can have hard spastic muscles that are neither painful nor tender to the touch, but are still in trouble. And this is why you can have muscle spasms for years without being aware of the creeping 'insidious' growth of such muscle spasm.

What Does it Mean When I Feel Worse Before I Feel Better?

Hard, spastic muscles tend to increase your endorphin levels, so as muscles are softened and tone decreases with NeuroSoma Muscle Therapy, you might feel an increase of pain in the treated area, or even in another part of the body. This is because the amount of endorphin previously needed to block your spastic muscle pain now becomes less. Your muscles are literally 'waking up', and you can feel the pain of the remaining spasm. This is a good thing – and here's why.

First, you're now aware of the spastic muscle you didn't know about before; remember, a spastic muscle is in an undesirable state, whether you can feel it or not; it compresses nerves, vessels, and joints. If you had a tumor that was putting pressure on an organ, but you couldn't feel it, or if there were a blocked artery in your heart but felt no pain, wouldn't you want to know about them?

In fact, 50% of heart attack cases are due to blocked arteries that don't hurt. So the presence or absence of pain is not the same thing as the presence or absence of a physical problem.

And I think I know why people with blocked heart arteries don't feel pain until it's almost too late: because they also have so much spastic muscle throughout their bodies, keeping their endorphin pumped up, blocking their pain. *(Editor's note: And, the same lactic acid that creates muscle spasm can also irritate and create plaque in blood vessels.)*

Second, you have more awareness of your muscles and their pain post-NeuroSoma treatment because they are soft enough to allow the endorphin system to decide it can reduce the level of endorphin. This may not happen with every treatment, but it happens often enough that we want you to understand what is happening when it does. It isn't cause for alarm, but a very good sign of muscle tone being normalized. As muscles become softer, they no longer compress nerves, vessels, or joints, and this is all good. It means you are on your way back to better health, and to feeling good again in a lasting way.

Thanks for reading this.
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