



45 WAYS TO TAME YOUR PAIN

FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION



EASE YOUR PAIN

FIND OUT HOW TO MANAGE ARTHRITIS PAIN WITHOUT DRUGS.

More than 100 forms of arthritis and many other medical problems share a common symptom: pain. But all pain is not the same. And while medications can effectively treat it in some cases, they may not eliminate it – and medications sometimes have unpleasant side effects.

In these pages, you'll learn about effective ways to help manage your pain from arthritis and related conditions without a prescription. They range from lifestyle measures to techniques, devices and over-the-counter treatments. Work with your doctor to find the combination that's right for you.

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TYPES OF PAIN

Nociceptive pain. Nerve endings (nociceptors) detect injuries to tissue, like cuts and burns, and transmit signals to the brain, which responds by producing painful sensations.

Neuropathic pain. Nerves can become diseased or damaged – by chemotherapy or diabetes, for example – and send faulty signals to the brain that trigger pain.

Centralized pain. This occurs when the central nervous system becomes hypersensitive to pain signals, so you hurt even if the source of your pain appears to be controlled or benign.

Acute pain. What you feel if you are injured or have surgery, for example; it might last a few hours or even a few weeks, but it eventually goes away.

Chronic pain. Pain is considered to be chronic when it lasts longer than it takes for the source of the pain – from an injury or surgery, for example – to heal.

QUICK FIXES

1 Heat increases blood flow to the painful area and relaxes muscles. Try a warm shower or heating pad. A paraffin bath or warm water can ease pain in hands and feet.

2 Cold can ease acute pain. It slows blood flow, numbs nerve endings and can reduce swelling after surgery or during a flare. Protect skin tissue from freezing by placing a towel between it and the ice pack.

3 Over-the-counter (OTC) gels, creams, rubs and patches that contain ingredients such as the numbing agent lidocaine, salicylate (a compound in aspirin) or capsaicin (the chemical that makes chili peppers hot) can ease joint pain. Talk to your doctor before using an OTC topical product.

4 A stabilizing and supportive splint, sleeve, brace or shoe insert can be helpful for some people with pain from arthritis or other musculoskeletal problems.



Apply heat or cold for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.




Regular physical activity can reduce pain and improve daily functioning by about 40%.

MOVING MORE

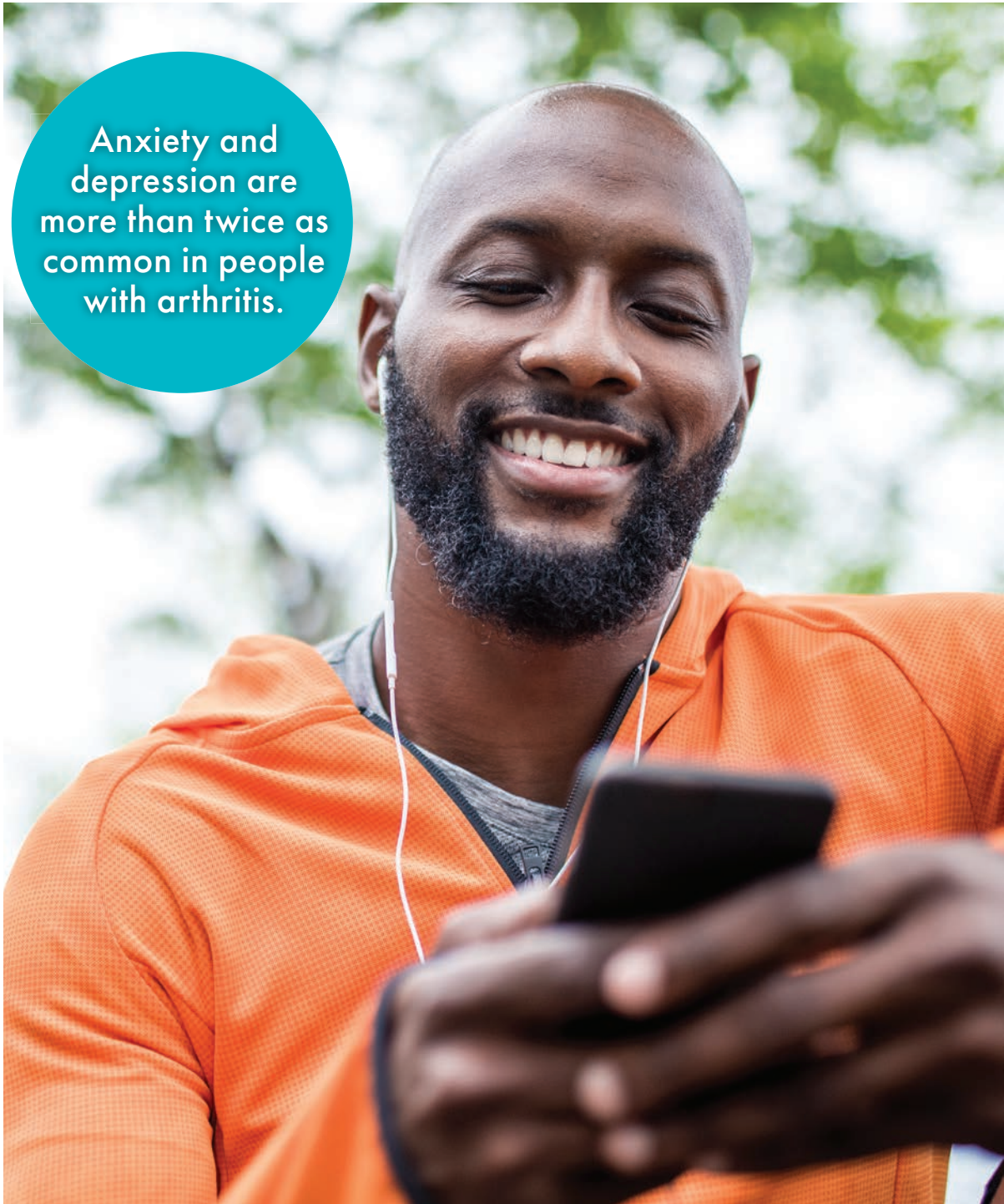
- 5** Even modestly increasing everyday activities, such as yardwork, housework, walking and climbing stairs, can significantly reduce pain and improve physical function.
- 6** A physical therapist can help you find an appropriate type of activity and show you how to do it safely.
- 7** An occupational therapist can show you exercises, devices and methods to help you do everyday movements with less pain, from lifting groceries to sitting at a computer.
- 8** Find activities you enjoy and work out with a friend or join a class to make it fun and help you stick with it. Some to consider: water aerobics, yoga, Pilates or tai chi.
- 9** Aim for 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week. Break it up into three 10-minute sessions if it's easier. Be sure to include cardiovascular, strengthening and stretching activities.
- 10** Try exercise videos or online classes on your own. One to check out: qigong, which has been shown to reduce pain even in people with long-term chronic pain.

STRESS SOOTHERS

- 11** Meditation has been shown to reduce chronic pain and help pain perception. Prayer can also be effective.
- 12** Stick to an exercise regimen. Studies show that people who are active regularly have lower levels of stress.
- 13** Controlled breathing creates a physiological response that releases stress.
- 14** Progressive muscle relaxation combines controlled breathing with the contraction and relaxation of muscle groups.
- 15** Visualization, or “guided imagery,” helps stress and pain recede. For example, picture yourself getting into an elevator, descending slowly and arriving at a safe, calm scene, like a beach or a beloved swing in the backyard.
- 16** Spending 20 minutes or more outside in nature reduces the stress hormone cortisol as well as blood pressure.
- 17** Take news and social media fasting days. Instead, take a walk, read a book or catch up with a friend.



Studies show practicing yoga may ease stress and anxiety.



Anxiety and depression are more than twice as common in people with arthritis.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

18 Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which involves learning to replace dysfunctional thoughts with constructive ones, is one of the most effective methods to treat depression, anxiety and pain. Another psychotherapy method, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), helps patients learn to accept and compartmentalize their pain.

19 Hobbies and passions, such as music, sports, sewing or sailing, are not only pleasant distractions, but they also trigger natural, pain-relieving chemicals. Getting together with friends, watching a funny movie and other enjoyable activities have a similar effect.

20 People with a positive outlook have better health outcomes than those who don't. Negative thoughts make pain worse and can lead to "avoidance coping," such as taking prescription drugs just to get through the day.

21 Prioritizing self-care and your pain-management plan over job, family and other responsibilities is critical.

22 Using a virtual reality (VR) system blocks pain signals and triggers the brain to release pain-relieving chemicals, easing pain by as much as 25%.

SLEEP

23 Physical activity is one of the best ways to improve sleep quality, but not too close to bedtime.

24 Alcohol can help you fall asleep, but it may keep you from staying asleep. Drink in moderation. Also limit caffeine, which can disrupt sleep, after noon.


25 If sleep doesn't come after 20 minutes, get up and do something calming until you're sleepy.

26 Make your bedroom quiet, comfortable and dark, and set your thermostat at 65 degrees, the optimal temperature for sleeping.

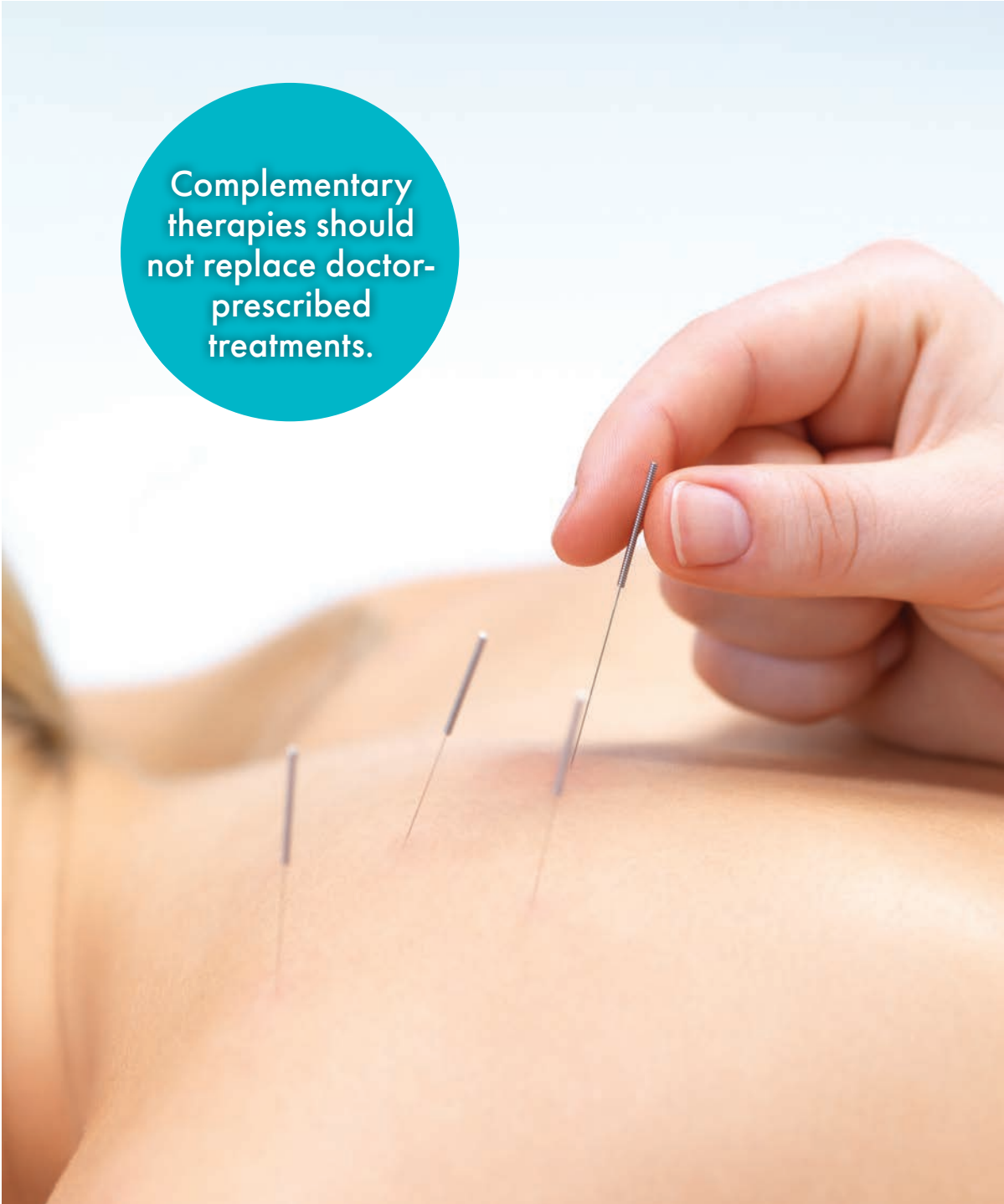
27 Most electronic devices emit blue light that signals your brain that it's time to wake up. Turn them off at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

28 Take a hot bath; the drop in your core temperature prepares the body for sleep.

29 Get up and go to bed at the same time every day, and reserve your bed for sleeping and sex.



In a vicious cycle, pain can disrupt sleep, and poor sleep worsens pain.



Complementary therapies should not replace doctor-prescribed treatments.

ADDITIONAL THERAPIES

30 Studies suggest massage may help with low back pain, knee pain from osteoarthritis (OA) and chronic neck pain. Be sure your massage therapist has experience with your condition and knows where you hurt.

31 The evidence for acupuncture is mixed. Some studies suggest it can be beneficial for knee OA. It's less clear whether it helps with other types of musculoskeletal pain, including low back pain. Acupressure, based on the same principles as acupuncture, uses hand pressure instead of needles and may also help.

32 Spinal manipulation, generally performed by a chiropractor, has been found to ease low back and neck pain. People with active inflammation, a fused spine or osteoporosis in the spine or neck should avoid it.

33 Studies show that hypnosis can significantly decrease pain. In one study, people with fibromyalgia experienced on average a 35% decrease in pain with hypnosis.

NUTRITION

34 Eat more whole, unprocessed foods, including fresh, seasonal produce; healthy protein like skinless chicken or fatty fish; healthy fats, like avocado and walnuts; and whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice and oatmeal.

35 Choose frozen veggies and fruit (without sauces or added sugar, salt or fat) when your favorites are out of season. Canned options can also be healthy but read ingredient labels and choose them wisely, and rinse canned foods to remove excess salt and other additives.

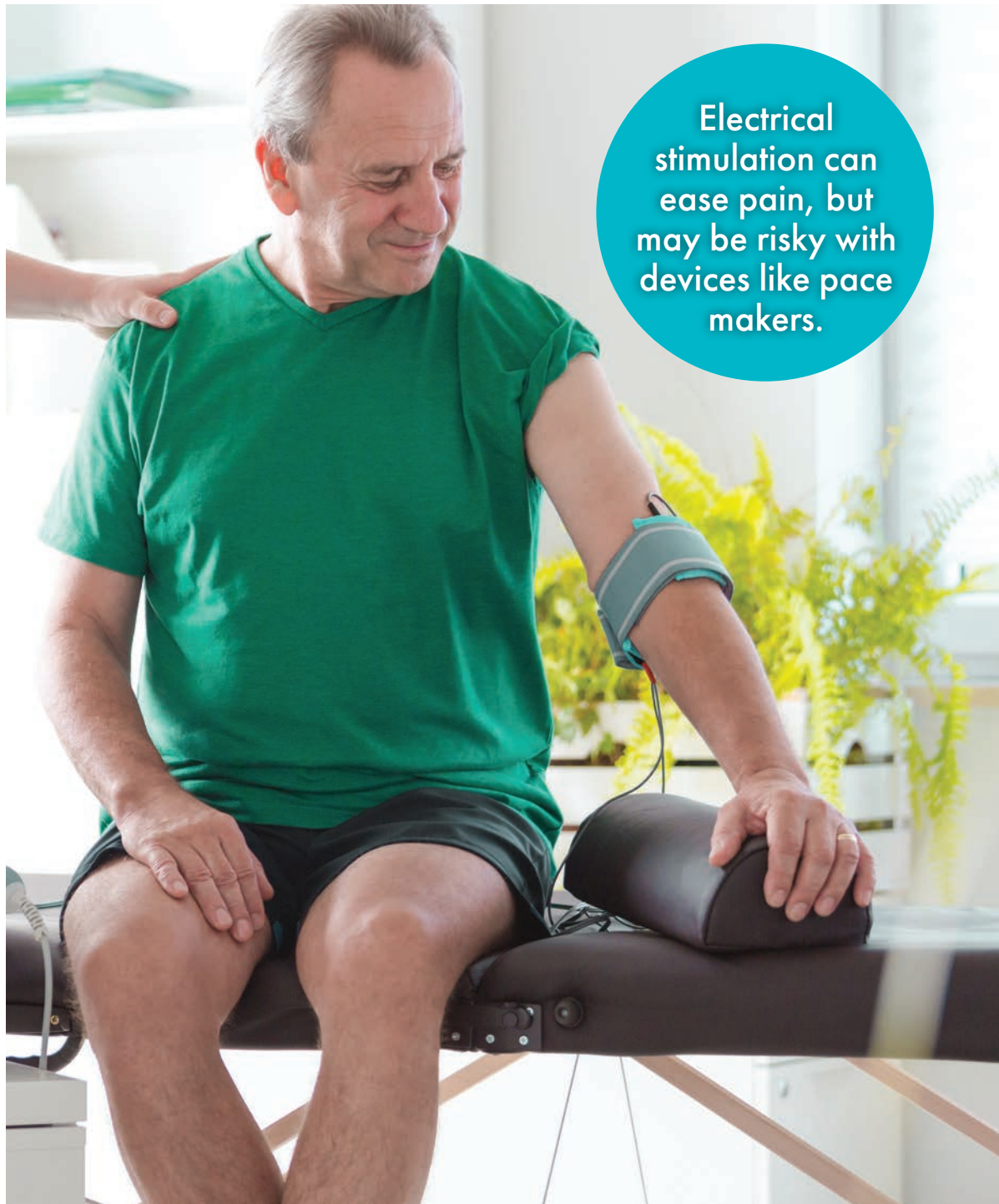
36 Use oils rich in mono- and polyunsaturated fats (such as olive, avocado, walnut, grapeseed and canola).

37 Try naturally fermented foods, such as yogurt (plain, live-culture varieties), miso and kombucha. Probiotics created by fermentation may improve the strength and diversity of your gut microbiome, which might help ease pain-inducing inflammation.

38 Reduce or eliminate red, cured and processed meats, which are often high in saturated fats and additives.



Eating healthfully
won't cure pain,
but it may help
reduce it.



Electrical stimulation can ease pain, but may be risky with devices like pace makers.

MEDICAL PROCEDURES

39 Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) involves a small machine that sends an electrical current to painful spots, or acupuncture points, triggering the release of pain-relieving endorphins and other chemicals.

40 In radiofrequency ablation, a needle, which is inserted next to a nerve, delivers an electrical current from radio waves to heat up problematic nerve tissue, interrupting pain signals. It is used mainly along the spine, but may also be used in a knee or hip joint.

41 In some cases, surgery can fix a problem that's causing the pain, such as joint replacement surgery for bone-on-bone arthritis. This generally is considered only after less invasive options have been exhausted.

42 A deficiency in vitamin B12 – found in animal-derived foods such as meat, eggs, poultry and dairy – plays a role in nerve pain. If you're deficient, a B12 shot or prescription supplement may help.

CBD & MEDICAL MARIJUANA

43 There is evidence that the cannabis plant (two varieties include hemp and marijuana) may help chronic pain. But more research is needed to understand the best forms and dosages, which types of pain it works best for and long-term side effects.

44 CBD (cannabidiol), one of cannabis' active compounds, may help relieve chronic musculoskeletal pain, but little quality research exists in humans. It's available in many forms, including capsules, extracts, infusions, topical ointments and edibles. Some products may contain varying amounts of THC (the active compound in cannabis that causes a "high" in users, unlike CBD).

45 Laws regarding marijuana and CBD vary by state. Under federal law, both are still illegal (except for one medication for childhood epilepsy) although that may change. If you want to try CBD or medical marijuana for your pain, talk to your doctor. These products are largely unregulated.



Buyer beware:
CBD products may
have contaminants
or misleading
labels.



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