

Six drug-free ways to ease pain

These healthier alternatives to opioids and other strong pain medications are worth considering.

Feeling bad is a real pain. Everything from headaches to injuries can make you miss out on the good moments in your life. They can also have you reaching into the medicine cabinet for fast relief. Many over-the-counter and prescription medications are effective painkillers. But do you really need them? Or, should they be your first go-to solution? The answer is different for everyone. Medicines that are meant to heal us may also hurt us. Some may lead to organ damage, bad drug interactions and addiction — especially if you take multiple medications, take some for too long or take them for conditions they weren't originally meant to treat.

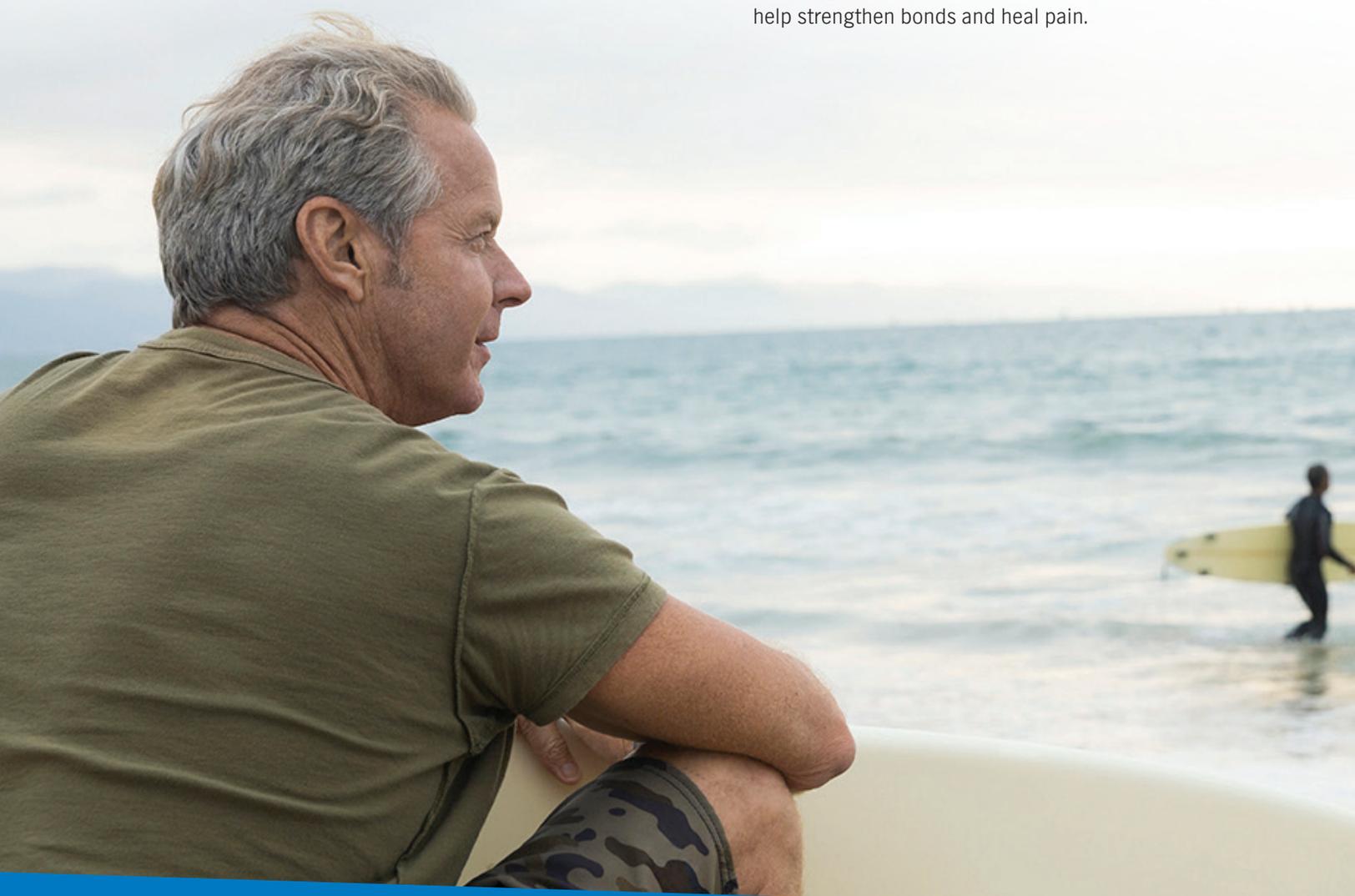
Comfort that's in your control

Always work with your doctor to manage your type of pain, especially if you have a chronic condition or have had surgery. Also, talk to him/her about more conservative, natural measures, like these, that alone or along with other medically necessary means may help soothe what hurts you.

- 1. Relax** — Deep breathing. Massage. Physical therapy. Imagining things and places that comfort you. These are some of the ways that can help you quiet your mind, slow your breathing and heart rate, and dial back the stress-pain reaction.
- 2. Move** — Regular exercise helps you keep extra weight off. And that's a great way to take some pressure off achy joints and muscles. Exercise also releases "feel good" chemicals in your brain that can lessen pain and boost your sense of well-being. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week, like brisk walking, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week, like jogging.



3. **Quit** – Smoking makes pain worse. The same addictive chemicals that help a tobacco user feel relaxed also limit the ability for oxygen and nutrients to get to vital organs and tissues, especially the spine. Over time, the tissues weaken and lead to painful conditions like osteoporosis. Smoking can also make arthritis worse and slow healing after illness, injury or surgery.
4. **Soothe** – Hot and cold therapies can feel good when you're stressed or injured. A cool cloth on a skin burn can keep swelling down. A heating pad on a sore back can improve your blood flow. A hot shower or bath when a headache strikes can ease tension from head to toe.
5. **Laugh** – No joking, health experts say anything from giggling to LOLing can help relieve stress. While you're cracking up, blood is flowing through your body. Your heart and lungs are getting a good workout. Your brain is releasing natural painkillers. And that's just what happens in the short-term. Keep laughing and, over time, it can help you build up your immune system and fight serious illness.
6. **Give and get affection** – Humans need affection just like they need food, water and sleep. We crave it, actually. If we get too little of it, we can feel lonely and disconnected from other people. And if emotional pain goes on too long, a lonesome, sad spirit can also hurt you physically. Luckily, this one can be easier to fix. Face-to-face visits and hugging those close to you are some of the ways to help strengthen bonds and heal pain.



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