



Summer 2009

A newsletter from the Wellness Program at The Pain Center of Arizona.

What are you doing this Summer? Steps to take for a pain free summer.

By Petra Peper, Ph.D.

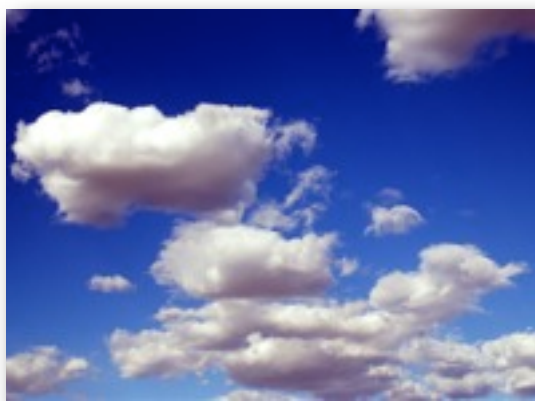
It is a very common question this time of year. For chronic pain patients this question can be a difficult one to answer. Because of your pain condition you probably have limitations in your ability to participate in some of the more traditional activities of summer. Hearing about the plans your friends and family have may result in your thinking more about what you can't do than what you can do.

Chances are your plans will include time with loved ones who do not have a chronic pain condition. If taking a vacation is part of your plans, you may at some point feel obligated to not allow your chronic pain to take away from every one else having fun. This newsletter will focus on ways you can make your summer as enjoyable as possible.

Step 1. Create a Success Mindset

What you think about ahead of time can make a big difference.

- 1. Set and Maintain Realistic Expectations:** During the year you probably get together with family and friends on your “good days” when your pain is tolerable, and limit or avoid socializing when you have higher pain days. As a result, they may overestimate your ability to participate in activities. If your summer includes scheduled events, be sure to inform your friends/extended family about what you may not be able to do if your pain flares up. Check yourself too—make sure you are also realistic about what you can do and how long you can do it.
- 2. Put Your Pain Condition in its Place:** Take responsibility for minimizing how much your pain condition interferes with your summer plans. Although it may be uncomfortable, talk about your pain condition with your travel companions before the trip to avoid it becoming the center of attention. If you could use assistance, let them know what they can do. Just as important, kindly let them know what you prefer they not do (such as asking about your pain level throughout the day or doing things for you that you can do yourself). The more you address these issues before the trip or get together, the more you will all be able to focus on what’s important—time together.
- 3. Do Some Trouble Shooting:** Gather as much specific information as you can about the travel schedule or planned activities. Use this information to identify what personal challenges you will face (e.g., staying longer than you should because you feel pressured, agreeing to do things because you don’t want to be a bother, not knowing how to say no). Create a plan to deal with those issues and possibly ask for help from someone who understands and can support you. Develop a back-up plan you can use if you need to withdraw from an activity or not participate at all.



Step 2. Manage Your Pain

While socializing, there are basic things you can do to increase your odds for success.



- 1. Monitor your pain level:** Effective pain management begins with periodically checking your pain level. When you are with others you may unintentionally tend to ignore or tolerate your pain level which can result in your pain getting so high that it takes over. If you catch an increase in pain early on, you can take steps to reduce it.
- 2. Respond to Increases in Pain:** When your pain increases, take action when you need to. Don't let your pride, stubbornness or fear of being a bother interfere and keep you from taking medication, resting or leaving early. If you respond to an increase in pain early on you can minimize the chances of having your pain spoil your plans for the rest of the day or even longer.
- 3. Pace Yourself:** When possible, try to schedule activities and socializing during your best time of day. If your plans include visiting different family members or friends, make sure you give yourself enough time between visits to keep your pain level manageable. If you do participate in an activity that increases your pain, be sure to schedule some time for rest and recovery.
- 4. Accept Your Limitations:** When you are unable to participate in activities or you need to withdraw, accept it. Avoid self-defeating thought patterns such as feeling guilty, needing to justify yourself or feeling like a burden. Stress and worry can increase your muscle tension and pain level. They also decrease your ability to tolerate pain, make you more irritable and interfere with your concentration.
- 5. Focus on What is Important:** What you think about determines your mood. While spending time with friends and loved ones, focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do. Think about ways to make the best of the time you have together. It's a chance to be creative and take control. If you start thinking about what you can't do, remind yourself that this thinking pattern will sabotage your chances of enjoying yourself. The price you pay could be your vacation experience.
- 6. Final Tip:** Use this newsletter to start the ball rolling. Share this handout with your friends and family as a way to start talking about how to make your summer the best it can be.

*On behalf of the Wellness Program
we wish you a safe and enjoyable summer!*

The information contained in this newsletter is provided for patient education and as a general guideline for managing the impact of your chronic pain. If you are interested in treatment to assist you in developing additional pain management coping strategies speak with your pain management doctor or call Kari Kies, Wellness Program coordinator at (623) 241-6132 to schedule an appointment with Dr. Peper.



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ThePainCenter.com
623.516.8252