

Laser Therapy provides relief from Back Pain

By Dr. Deidre Macdonald, ND

Back pain affects 80% of people at some point in their life. It is a major cause of loss of work, decreased life satisfaction, reduced activity and overuse of medication. A state of the art therapy for back pain called Low Level Laser therapy, is now available in the Comox Valley. This technology has brought relief to 1000's of back pain sufferers. Practitioners who use it consistently state that laser therapy is the most effective and non-invasive way to eliminate inflammation and control pain.

What causes back pain: Back pain can be caused by the muscles and other soft tissue or by the vertebrae. Most back pain is caused by the muscles, ligaments and tendons with muscle spasm and inflammation being present in most back issues. The most common cause of vertebral back issues is degeneration of the structures of the spine, often causing pinched nerves. Spinal cord impingement, or spinal stenosis, can be caused by, among other things, inflammation of the ligaments which encase the spinal cord. True disc problems only account for about 5% of cases of back pain. In fact, many people's spines have bulging discs, but they will only experience pain if there is inflammation present. Inflammation and damaged, degenerated structures account for most back pain. Therefore, treatments should aim to reduce inflammation and reverse degeneration.

Traditional treatments: The first response for many back pain sufferers is to go to their medical doctor who may order x-rays, MRI or CT. While it is essential to attempt to diagnose the source of the problem, the treatment options available to MD's are very limited. Surgery is only appropriate for about 5% of back pain sufferers. Pharmaceutical anti-inflammatory drugs may provide some needed short term relief, but they don't address the cause of the problem or promote tissue healing. In addition, anti-inflammatories are very hard on the stomach lining and other organs of the body. The most effective anti-inflammatories, the COX-2 inhibitors unfortunately caused thousands of deaths from cardiovascular events before they were pulled from the market. Alternatively, chiropractic manipulation can help to align and mobilize the spine and pelvis, again important, but it is not able to reduce inflammation and may cause more grief in an acutely inflamed back. Massage is important to improve circulation, drainage and to break up trigger points in the muscles. However, it can't treat the inflammation and tissue damage that is inherent in back pain.

Laser therapy: Laser therapy is a treatment which is scientifically proven to target the inflammation and tissue damage that cause most back pain. Whether it is used alone or in combination with other treatments, it is a very effective therapy for giving people relief from back pain and allowing them to resume their activities. The Cochran Review found 5 scientific studies showing that laser therapy was effective for back pain. In a study tracking 100 patients with confirmed disc problems, 90% of them resolved within 14 treatments with a state of the art laser machine. In addition, it is has been proven to give long term relief from arthritis pain.

How does laser therapy work: Low level laser therapy stimulates cellular function at many levels. In essence it promotes the healing of tissues from the skin to the deep spinal structures by increasing cellular ATP (fuel) output, improving circulation and lymphatic drainage, reducing inflammatory chemicals, and promoting cellular replication and collagen synthesis. The net effect is that healing occurs on the level of the muscles, bones, ligaments, nerves and tendons and pain is reduced or eliminated.

Dr. Macdonald's comments: "Over the 12 years I have practiced as a naturopathic physician, I have seen so many people suffer from back pain, arthritis, and joint pain. It has given me great satisfaction to now have the ability to provide relief to patients who had tried so many other therapies and yet still suffered with chronic pain. If a course of laser therapy can reduce pain and allow my patient to increase their exercise and reduce their pain medications, then I know their long term health has been positively impacted. In fact, I was one of those people. After 6 years and 13 different practitioners, I was still suffering from chronic back pain. Laser

therapy provided relief within a few sessions. I continue to use the laser therapy to heal up all the sports injuries I incur now that I am able to exercise vigorously again! “

The Meditech difference: Not all lasers are created equal. Older technology consisted of a single low powered probe. Now, high powered probes are coupled with large, flexible light pads that can be wrapped around injured tissue to saturate larger areas with light therapy. Meditech is a Canadian company run by a vascular surgeon. They produce state of the art equipment and also have a large clinic in Toronto. Their machines can be found in 380 clinics around North America, including professional sports teams and hospitals. This powerful technology is available at Dr. Macdonald’s office in Courtenay.

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