

MAYO CLINIC HEALTH LETTER

RELIABLE INFORMATION FOR A HEALTHIER LIFE

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 4 APRIL 2005

Inside this issue

HEALTH TIPS 3

Sensitive teeth.

NEWS AND OUR VIEWS 4

Treatment counters **low blood pressure** upon standing. New drug released for **alcohol dependency**.

TEN GOTTA-HAVE FOODS 4

Eating for good health.

CARDIAC PET SCANS 6

Sometimes, a clearer answer.

ACHILLES RUPTURE 7

Tending to tendon health.

SECOND OPINION 8

Can a food be both partially hydrogenated and trans-fat free?

Coming in May

EMPHYSEMA

It can take your breath away.

PAIN MEDICATIONS

Identifying risks.

VITAMIN D

Individualize your dose.

PHOBIAS

When fear becomes a problem.

Alternative treatments

Dealing with chronic pain

One of your best friends has battled pain from arthritis for years with medications, exercise and rest when needed. Now, she's added self-hypnosis for pain relief and finds it helpful when she has flare-ups.

She's hardly alone in trying a form of complementary or alternative medicine to manage chronic pain. A recent survey found that more than a third of U.S. adults use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Chronic pain is the most frequent reason people seek care outside traditional medicine.

Defining the players

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

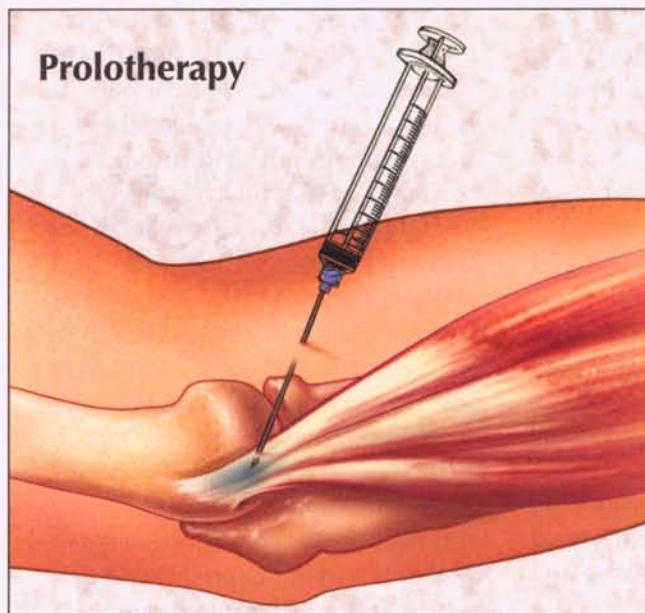
— a division of the National Institutes of Health — defines complementary and alternative medicine in broad terms. CAM is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that aren't considered part of conventional medicine. The five CAM categories are:

■ *Alternative medical systems* — These include practices such as acupuncture and ayurveda medicine. Ayurveda involves customizing dietary and herbal remedies for the individual and emphasizes the whole person — mind, body and spirit — in treating and preventing disease.

■ *Mind-body interventions* — These methods, such as meditation and guided imagery, are used to help promote healing by employing mental strategies to influence the body.

■ *Manipulating and adjusting the body* — These include practices such as massage and chiropractic.

■ *Biologically based therapies* — These include the use of herbs and



When chronic ligament or tendon pain hasn't responded to more-conservative treatments, prolotherapy may be helpful. Prolotherapy involves injections that introduce an inflammatory (sclerosing) agent to affected ligaments or tendons. The sclerosing agent causes a temporary low-grade inflammation. It's thought that this inflammation leads to production of connective tissue, which strengthens loosened tendons or ligaments and results in less pain.

APRIL 2005

may find it's easier to relax deeply using slow, rhythmic breathing rather than hypnosis. Your psychologist or mental health therapist can help you find the technique that works best for you.

What's prolotherapy?

Pain that affects muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones and joints — broadly referred to as musculoskeletal pain — can be a chronic problem. Treatments vary with the location and cause of the pain. In the case of chronic ligament or tendon pain that hasn't responded to more conservative treatments — such as prescribed exercise and physical therapy — prolotherapy may be helpful.

Prolotherapy is an alternative treatment. It involves a series of injections that introduce an inflammatory (sclerosing) agent to affected ligaments or tendons. Once injected, the sclerosing agent causes a temporary low-grade inflammation. It's thought that this inflammation leads to production of connective tissue (collagen), which then strengthens loosened tendons or ligaments and results in less pain.

Ligament or tendon pain may be due to laxity or instability of these connective tissues. Locations most likely to benefit from prolotherapy include the:

- Ankle
- Knee
- Elbow
- Sacroiliac joint, in the lower back

Prolotherapy isn't meant for use with nerve-related pain or bony pain. It doesn't treat arthritis or muscular pain.

Prolotherapy treatments for a painful ligament or tendon are usually spread out over several sessions. Part of the reason for this is that the area being treated is relatively large and can't be treated completely in one session. It's also a matter of time. Unlike corticosteroid injections — which may provide temporary relief — prolotherapy involves improving the injected tissue by stimulating tissue growth.

A place for CAM

Complementary and alternative medicine is increasingly attracting the attention of health care consumers. The desire to feel better and stay active, no matter what your age, can become a strong incentive for seeking treatments not typically thought of as traditional medicine.

Doing so with your eyes wide open and in full communication with your regular physician can result in a more successful experience — and possibly even a better outcome. □

Why complementary and alternative medicine?

A government survey offers insight into why people choose complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

Topping the list, 55 percent of adults said they would most likely use CAM because they believed it would improve their health when used with conventional medical treatments.

Half of those taking the survey said they thought CAM would be interesting to try. About a quarter of responders said they used CAM at the suggestion of a conventional medical professional. Thirteen percent said they used CAM because of the cost of conventional medicine.

Health tips

Sensitive teeth

Certain stimuli — such as hot, cold, sweet or sour foods, touch, and even air — can cause pain in sensitive teeth. It's usually caused by tooth enamel erosion or gum recession. To manage the problem:

- *Try using a desensitizing toothpaste* — These products contain compounds that help block sensation that might otherwise reach and stimulate pain in a tooth's nerve. Choose a product displaying the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. It normally takes a little while for these to take effect, but if you don't notice improvement after several weeks, check with your dentist. Avoid using whitening or tartar control toothpastes as they may temporarily increase sensitivity to hot and cold.

- *Brush properly* — To avoid gum recession and root damage, use a soft toothbrush and brush with short back-and-forth strokes and a gentle up-and-down motion. Brush thoroughly and floss daily.

- *See your dentist* — If you still have discomfort when brushing, flossing, chewing or drinking, you may need dental treatment. Your dentist can determine the exact cause of the sensitivity. Sometimes coating sensitive areas of affected teeth with a fluoride gel or special desensitizing agent helps. If the culprit is tooth decay, a cracked tooth or worn filling, these should be treated. □