

PATIENT NEWSLETTER

# NORTHWEST SPINE AND PAIN MEDICINE

## FEELING SAFE IN UNCERTAINTY

< PSYCHOLOGY

BY PATRICIA FERNANDEZ, CHIEF OF PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT, PSYD

In times of uncertainty, like the COVID-19 crisis, we often feel a lack of safety. With decreased access to cues that create a sense of safety and comfort, such as social interactions or consistent day-to-day schedules, you may experience an increased awareness of threatening cues which bring about a sense of discomfort that surfaces our fight/flight (hyperarousal) or shutdown/despair (hypoarousal). Now many of us are left to wonder... *how can we access a sense of safety in these troubling times?* Here are some safety cues to consider as you search for consistency and grounding during the COVID-19 crisis: **Context, Connection, and Choice.**

1. **Context:** *The context we find ourselves in provides us with cues either of safety or threat.*

Currently, our external environment has ample opportunity to inform us of threats. Honoring these threats with compassion and taking a moment to ask yourself what you need to respond to threatening cues can help resituate your context. This is a highly individual process, and each person can develop a "menu" of response cues to aid in resituating your context. Looking for or creating micro-cues, e.g. images like your coffee cup, a flower, or perhaps nature, can invite an exploration of your individual safety cues.

2. **Connection and co-regulation:** *The way in which one's autonomic nervous system sensitively interacts with another's to facilitate greater emotional balance and physical health.*

We know that connection is essential for our nervous system and makes up the core of our experience day-to-day. Feeling safe is key to engaging in our environment. Noticing where you experience co-regulation will inform and build self-regulation. With many of our primary methods of connection being challenged by limitations set by CDC recommendations and guidelines, we are left to trace micro-moments of safety, collecting them to formulate a "menu" of soothing images or sensations, e.g. a person's smile, someone asking how you are, or a pet's touch. When you notice a moment to savor you can "anchor" it into your nervous system by inviting a simple gesture, e.g. placing your hand over your heart.



3. **Choice:** *Understanding we have the power to choose amongst options we are presented with.*

While we may have a limited repertoire of choices right now, we still have the opportunity to take control of our decisions within what we are presented with. By recognizing this we can open up our nervous system and avoid feeling trapped. Questions to ask yourself on your "menu" of safety, already built with micro-cues on images and sensations for your context and connections, may include: "What are the ways I can offer myself choices within the structure we now have to live with?" Tracing back our individual and communal sense of choice within micro-moments of choice can create a sense of safety within.

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In the weeks to come, invite yourself to build your own safety "menu" of micro-cues within your context, connections, and choices. Remember you are designed to search for cues of threat, and that when they surface it is a natural impulse to respond to them. Inviting compassion amidst sensations of fight/flight and shutdown/despair surfacing can look many different ways. Consider asking yourself what you may need in difficult moments and remember to speak to yourself as you would a loved one or dear friend. .

**Encourage yourself to find ways to be nourishing while exploring your safety in uncertainty.**

## WHY POSTURE MATTERS

BY DAVID SPRINGER, PT

**P**osture is a bit like brushing and flossing your teeth. In the moment it might not seem like it makes a big difference, but over time poor posture can lead to compressed nerves, worn out joints, headaches, impaired breathing, and overall strain to ligaments and tissues that weren't meant to carry heavy loads.

Like the blocks you played with as a child, your vertebrae are only stable if they're aligned properly. If you're out of alignment then ligaments, joints, muscles, and nerves take the brunt of the additional strain to keep your body upright. Whether you're sitting, standing, lying down, or performing a task, there are things you can do to prevent the pain that comes from bad posture. You're not alone with the battle that gravity wages on our bodies.

A number of things can place us at risk, such as: job related demands and habits, poor support when sitting or driving, core weakness, extra bodyweight, leg length differences and Scoliosis, just to mention a few common problems. People with osteoporosis or other musculoskeletal diseases can also suffer from deteriorating posture. For that matter, you may suffer from genetic predispositions that create biomechanical changes leading to poor posture.

The good news is that there are things you can do right now that will stop the wear and tear from poor posture and begin to support your healing from the pain it causes. The Physical Therapy Department at Northwest Spine and Pain Medicine can help you identify the top two or three postural culprits that are exacerbating your pain. Ask your provider for a postural assessment to help know where to start.\*

**\*YOU CAN REACH US AT (509) 464 - 6208 FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTURAL ASSESSMENTS WITH OUR PHYSICAL THERAPY DEPARTMENT, INCLUDING TELEHEALTH APPOINTMENTS.**

## PALMITOYLETHANOLAMIDE AND PAIN

BY DON HALCROW DC, PA-C

< CLINICAL

**M**anaging pain is crucial to a person's well-being and quality of life. Although many treatment approaches and strategies exist in the field of pain medicine, doctors and patients alike can sometimes feel frustrated by a less than satisfactory result when it comes to treating chronic pain. Additionally, the treatment of chronic pain with opioids or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can result in unwanted side-effects including hyperalgesia—an increase in the sensation of the very pain that doctors are trying to relieve. There is however a compound worth considering as a valid addition in pain management as it has the ability to reduce the inflammatory response and lower pain perception in many condition, e.g. Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetic and other neuropathies, back pain and endometriosis.

Palmitoylethanolamide. "Palm-it-oil-ethan-ole-amide" or simply PEA is an endogenous fatty acid amide. It is a natural compound made in many plant and animal cells, including our own cells. PEA promotes analgesia, limits inflammation, and all without any apparent side-effects. One of PEA's mechanisms of action, among others, is its effect on mast cells and microglial cells. Mast cells are triggered by an immune response or they rush to areas of injury and release powerful chemical mediators like histamine and cytokines. The initial inflammatory response is the body's way of protecting itself from further injury but an excessive or chronic inflammatory response is detrimental to our cells. PEA modulates the activity of mast cells by attaching to specific receptor sites and this quiets the "call to action" of mast cells. By modulating the activation of mast cells PEA reduces an excessive pro-inflammatory cascade initiated by the mast cells.

PEA has shown promise in clinical studies to reduce pain and improve quality of life. It's worthwhile to consider a trial course of PEA in micronized or ultra-micronized form to determine if there is any benefit in pain reduction.

## Looking to boost your immune support?

Our apothecary now carries Rare Planet Health's *Resilient* Immune Support Formula. The *Resilient* supplement is a custom blend of vitamins and supplements to support your immune system. While our bodies are full of helpful natural defenses, everyone can use a little jump start when it comes to keeping your immune system at the top of its game. The *Resilient* supplement includes: Organic Elderberry, Vitamin C, Vitamin D3, Vitamin B6, Vitamin E, and Zinc. One bottle contains 60 capsules (one month's supply) and can be purchased for **\$24.99**. Recommended dose is two capsules per day. To try a month's supply visit us at: <https://integratedapothecary.square.site/>

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