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## Ask the Expert Information Sheet

### Non-Pharmacological Pain Management for People Diagnosed with a Brain Tumour

*By: Laura Daly*

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Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada Information Sheets are provided as an informational and educational tool and are not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute for medical care. We urge you to seek specific medical advice on individual matters of concern.

Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada is generously supported by individuals, corporations and employee groups. It is through the tireless dedication of donors that help is available for anyone affected by a brain tumour, including patients, survivors and their loved ones.

Some people diagnosed with a brain tumour may experience pain. Pain associated with a brain tumour diagnosis may come from changes in your body, or as a result from common treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy and/or surgery. The type and severity of pain may vary from person to person. There are many different treatments available, and most often pain may be effectively managed. For some patients' non-pharmacological approaches may be an important part of their pain management regimen. These approaches may be used independently, or in conjunction with medications prescribed for pain relief.

If you live with chronic pain, you may know that it affects every facet of your life. Pain may influence your quality of life in several ways including: sleep disturbances, reduced appetite or altered ability to receive adequate nutrition, and increased fatigue and anxiety (Paice & Ferrell, 2011; Syrjala et al., 2014). Pain may affect you emotionally including increased feelings of depression, anxiety, irritability, hopelessness, thoughts of suicide, or anger. Unfortunately, these changes in sleep, diet, or mood may make your pain feel worse, evoking a cycle of negative impacts. Because pain may impact you in so many ways beyond just the physical effects, it is important to consider a pain management regimen utilizing an intergraded approach that addresses your needs holistically.

There is an increasing body of research showing the effectiveness of non-pharmacological approaches to pain (Hökkä et al., 2014). Stress-reducing techniques based in mindfulness may help to break the cycle of negative effects when living with pain. Research shows that depression or anxiety may contribute to increased sensations of pain; and inversely that pain may increase feelings of anxiety and depression (Farmer et al., 2010). Using mindfulness practices to decrease feelings of stress, anxiety and depression may help to reduce the amount of physical pain you experience.

Many stress-reduction techniques may help to reduce muscle tension, increase feelings of control, and increase over-all feelings of well-being. When living with illness, the sympathetic nervous system in your body may become over-activated due to stress, uncertainty, and anxiety. The sympathetic response is your fight, flight, or freeze response, and can be helpful if you need to quickly escape

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All patient resources are available free-of-charge in Canada. Call 1-800-265-5106 or visit [www.BrainTumour.ca](http://www.BrainTumour.ca) for additional details and information.

a dangerous situation. But when this response remains on high alert it can overwhelm you psychologically and physically, leaving you more susceptible to anxiety and tension, ultimately leaving you feeling exhausted or overwhelmed.

Techniques based in mindfulness such as meditation, visualizations, body-scans, groundings, or breathing exercises may contribute to relaxation and help you relate to your pain differently. Rather than engaging in the automatic thoughts associated with pain (e.g.: "this is horrible", "I can't stand this" "I have no control. It's hopeless") which may cause increased body tension and lead to lowered mood, mindfulness may allow you to relate to your pain in new ways and feel more in control and empowered.

Talk to your health care team about what may be right for you. Your pain is unique to you, and therefore calls for an individualized care-plan.

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Thank you to **Laura Daly**, Clinical Counsellor, The Complex Chronic Diseases Program, BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre and 2016 Recipient of the Health Care Professional – Professional Development Grant for writing this article.

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