



Friday 3 May 2024

Can diet help chronic pain?

People living with chronic pain would benefit from more research into the links between pain and diet along with targeted nutritional advice, a meeting of specialist pain medicine physicians in Brisbane will be told today (Friday 3 May).

Physiotherapist Dr Rowena Field says there is little evidence-based nutrition advice for people struggling with pain.

“When it comes to patients with persisting pain, we need more research and better nutritional advice,” she will tell the annual symposium of the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA).

NSW-based Dr Field, who specialises in dietary interventions to treat chronic pain, has spent several years exploring how diet might be related to chronic pain.

“While the current Australian dietary guidelines are designed to reduce the risk of getting chronic disease, they do not tell you what to eat if you have a chronic illness.

“When it comes to patients with persistent pain, we need more research and better nutritional advice.”

Dr Field says changing someone’s diet to treat their pain is not often on the radar of treating health professionals - or the patient themselves.

In a recent analysis Dr Field undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis of whole food diets that lasted longer than two weeks, and where pain was evaluated before and after the diet intervention.

“We screened about 7000 articles to find 48 groups that had been given a diet to treat their pain. These ranged from vegan/vegetarian diets to Mediterranean diets through to elimination diets such as gluten-free.

“Of those 48 groups, 17 reported a clinically significant pain improvement, suggesting that at least for some people, their diet did make a difference. We found that there was an overall positive effect of whole food diets on pain, but no diet stood out in terms of effectiveness.

“This suggests that maybe the things the diets have in common - such as diet quality, nutrient density and weight loss may all be involved in modulating pain physiology and providing pain relief.”

Dr Field says whole-food diets that restrict ultra-processed sugary foods and increase omega-3 and antioxidant intake can be a valid pain management tool.

More than 120 specialist pain medicine physicians from Australia, New Zealand and the US are meeting in Brisbane for the FPM symposium.

**For more information or to request interviews please contact ANZCA Media Manager
Carolyn Jones on +61 408 259 369 or cjones@anzca.edu.au**