

Solving the Complicated Problem of Pain

After hundreds of years of studying pain, the medical community's view of pain is changing. Once thought of as just a symptom of other conditions, experts now define pain as disease in itself. Even the federal government has shifted its thinking. (Since 2018 the Department of Veterans Affairs has been awarding disability ratings to veterans for their pain alone without needing an underlying diagnosis to make it compensable. Service connection still needs to be established by showing the VA that an in-service event, injury, or illness caused the pain, and the veteran's pain must cause some type of functional impairment or loss. For more on this topic see the next article in this newsletter.)

If you are coping with pain, you are not alone.

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Cuddigan Law
cuddiganlaw.com
402.933.5318

Consider these pain statistics:

- In the U.S. 76.5 million people over the age of 20 (about 26% of the population) suffer from chronic pain.
- About 80% of all Americans will experience some form of back pain during their lifetime.
- 42 million Americans say that pain interrupts their sleep several times a week.
- Only 58 % of patients say prescription painkillers effectively treat their pain, according to the American Academy of Pain Medicine.

In its broadest classification, there are two types of pain: acute pain and chronic pain. Acute pain is short-lived pain caused by broken bones, surgery, cuts, burns, and similar causes. "Acute pain may last a few seconds (a pinch), a few days (a paper cut) or weeks to months (broken bone or sprain)", Nationwide Children's Hospital says. "Acute pain goes away when your body has healed to the best of its ability and the danger is gone." When the pain does not go away in about three months or less, it is classified as chronic pain. If you have chronic pain your body is exhibiting a sensitive response that is no longer harmful. Nationwide Children's Hospital explains that "some



Positive emotions can significantly lower pain when patients stop focusing on how bad they feel.

chronic pain conditions have a well-known cause, but most chronic pain goes on with no clear reason. In both cases, the body's response is more intense than it should be."

"You would have every right to be offended if someone said your pain was all in your head," the Arthritis Foundation says. "But the truth is, pain is constructed entirely in the brain. This doesn't mean your pain is any less real – it's just that your brain literally creates what your body feels, and in cases of chronic pain, your brain helps perpetuate it."

Medical researchers are starting to understand how our emotions play a leading role in pain. Pain and emotion circuits overlap in the brain. Negative emotions like anger, worry, sadness, and depression can increase pain. Obesity, too, can worsen chronic pain. Studies have shown that depressed people are three to four times more likely to suffer

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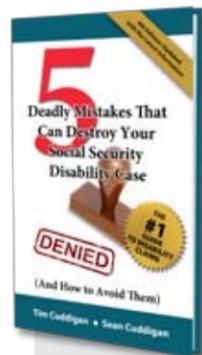


Solving Pain...cont.

from chronic pain than those who aren't depressed. "Negative emotions are like gasoline thrown on the fire of pain, not only making chronic pain much worse, but even causing it in some cases", says Beth Darnall, PhD, a pain psychologist and associate professor at Stanford University.

"The opposite is also true," says the Arthritis Foundation. "Positive emotions can significantly lower pain when patients stop focusing on how bad they feel. Many with chronic pain agree, noting that when they're in a worse place emotionally, they're less motivated to exercise and see friends and family. These are essential to changing pain patterns because they help break the pattern of ruminating on pain and they trigger the release of feel-good endorphins."

There was a time when there were hundreds of pain clinics across America. The introduction of opioids in the 1990s resulted in the shuttering of most of these clinics. Now that we know about the terrible addictive effects of opioids, pain clinics are making a comeback to help patients manage their pain without drugs. "Instead, people learn to manage pain by modifying or changing what their brain tells them. Many say this approach relieves pain without drugs – in some cases it's the first time they've gotten relief," the Arthritis Foundation reports. Pain-management protocols these days involve intense sessions using exercise, occupational therapy, psychotherapy, and meditation to deal with pain issues.



"5 Deadly Mistakes That Can Destroy Your Social Security Disability Case" is the #1 guide to improving the odds of winning a disability case.

For a FREE copy for you or someone you care about call Cuddigan Law at 402.933.5318 or email us at lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com

Thousands of Veterans Who Suffer Chronic Pain May be Eligible for Benefits

A 2018 court ruling opened the door to VA disability benefits for thousands of veterans suffering from pain related to their military service. Before this legal decision, VA took the position that to be eligible for disability payments veterans had to have a clear diagnosis of an injury and, regardless of how much pain a vet was suffering, pain in and of itself was not a disability. This was a 19-year precedent used by the VA in denying more than 11,000 disability claims.

However, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit changed all of that with a ruling which said that pain, even without any underlying disability, may be a valid reason for awarding compensation. It cited the definition of a disability as "an impairment in the enjoyment of life or earning ability" and said that "pain [in and of itself] is a form of functional impairment."

At cuddiganlaw.com and on our YouTube channel you will find a number of videos which explore how VA disability benefits may be awarded for specific pain issues in the neck, back, shoulders, hips, feet, and more. You can view those for free whether or not you are one of our clients.



Comfort Food

From the kitchen of Janet Cuddigan

Black Bean Salsa

Here's an easy summertime recipe that doesn't require cooking, so both the kitchen and the cook can stay cooler. Serve this delicious salsa with chips or on its own as a salad.

- 2 (15 ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15 ounce) can yellow corn, drained
- 1 (15 ounce) can white corn, drained
- 1 (14.5 ounce) can Italian-style diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 bunch finely chopped cilantro
- 5 green onions, finely sliced
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- ¼ cup lime juice
- 1 avocado - peeled, pitted, and diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, or to taste

Stir together black beans, yellow and white corn, tomatoes, cilantro, green onions, red onion, bell pepper, and garlic in a large bowl. Gently mix in lime juice and avocado. Drizzle with olive oil to serve.

Adapted from allrecipes.com

Social Security and VA Disability Recipients Could Get an 8% Cost-Of-Living Bump Next Year

Recent government inflation data came in hotter than expected at an 8.6% annualized rate—the highest it has been since 1980 when inflation topped out at 14.5%.



Seniors and disabled Americans who qualify for monthly Social Security benefits and veterans who are receiving disability payments may get some relief, however, in the form of larger monthly checks. If record-high prices don't recede, the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2023 could eclipse this year's 5.9% increase. The Social Security Administration's chief actuary, Stephen Goss, said recently that next year's COLA could be "closer to 8%."

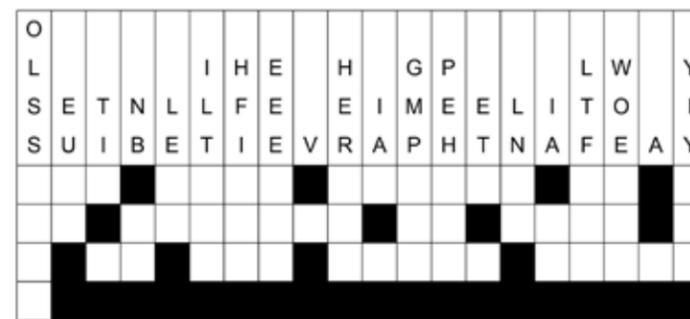
Federal laws stipulate that the amount of money paid to Americans who receive old age and disability benefits must be adjusted annually for inflation. The Social Security Administration uses one of the subsets of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) called the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) during the third quarter of the year (July, August and September) to calculate the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment. The precise COLA number and whether there will be a record high increase next year will depend on what happens to inflation numbers later this year.

Critics of the CPI-W say it is not an accurate measure of what seniors pay for goods and services. There are increasing calls from some Washington lawmakers to change the measure for the annual increases to the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) which they argue better measures the prices retirees pay



Drop Quote

Your task is to "drop" each of the letters into the appropriate square in each column, until the entire quote is revealed



For the solution go to cuddiganlaw.com/library/newsletter
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