

# UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

*Dedicated to increasing knowledge about safe and effective complementary and integrative medicine approaches.*

## Empowered Over Pain – a New Integrative Medicine Group Program

Ronald Glick, MD, Leslie Lesoon, PhD, MPAS, PA-C, Leah Northrop, LPC, MSPC

In 2011, The Institute of Medicine released a landmark monograph, *Relieving Pain in America*<sup>1</sup>. In over 300 pages, experts summarized what we know about the way pain is perceived and how it is managed and made recommendations for the coming years. Conclusions and recommendations included:

- Chronic pain is highly prevalent,
- It is associated with significant impact on functioning and quality of life,
- We need better ways to approach and treat it,
- Those approaches should include self-management, and
- Programs need to be scalable to reach large numbers of people.

Fast forward a mere decade and, according to the CDC 2019-2021 report on chronic pain in the US, 50 million adults, or over 20% of the population suffer from chronic pain<sup>2</sup>. A 2023 study by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) at NIH, found that the rate of chronic pain is approximately 21% and high-impact chronic pain among adults is nearly 8%<sup>3,4</sup>. While most patients surveyed reported that pain was still present one year after their first survey, approximately 10% of people “recovered” from chronic pain within that period, reporting significant reduction in level of pain and associated limitations. This gives hope that early intervention has the potential to alleviate significant suffering.

UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh are a part of an integrative medicine consortium of over 80 hospital systems and universities. The consortium published a review of complementary and integrative therapies that show research evidence for managing chronic pain<sup>5</sup>. These integrative modalities include acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage therapy. They also encompass self-care approaches such as mindfulness meditation, yoga, and tai chi.

Approximately 2/3 of the patients seen at the Center for Integrative Medicine at UPMC Shadyside, have a chronic pain condition, such as migraines, jaw joint pain, neck or low back pain, pelvic pain, or irritable bowel syndrome. Most of the services at the Center are not covered by insurance and costs are often a limiting factor in people’s ability to access this care. To provide an alternative, we developed a 6-week group program, Empowered Over Pain.

Our unique model is inspired by the work of Howard Schubiner, MD, a pain physician, who wrote the book, *Unlearn Your Pain*<sup>7</sup>. Dr. Schubiner developed an approach for teaching people pain management strategies that can significantly improve both their distress and pain experience. People benefit from reading his book, but the benefit is greater if a person participates in a group program that brings home the lessons.

Empowered Over Pain uses a biopsychosocial approach which includes education, movement, meditation, and weekly reflection exercises. The education component helps people understand how the connection between their bodily pain and their brain goes both ways. We explore the relationship between emotions and stress on pain perception. One concept that is often new to people is neuroplasticity. Or the idea that changes in one’s thoughts about the pain experience, mood, and stress levels can actually decrease the pain messages to the brain. Because of this, the experience of pain changes for the better. The ideas and activities in Empowered Over Pain open opportunities for people to move from habitual reactions to their pain that may “fuel the fire” to practices that can help break the repeated stress-pain cycle.

This program is experiential, and we incorporate short but powerful group movement sessions as well as mindfulness meditation throughout each session. We introduce practices such as Yoga and Tai Chi whose gentle approach to body and breath awareness complement the learning done throughout our group. Meditation practices sprinkled throughout each session add ‘brain breaks’ but also encourage attention to and practice of the mindfulness skills of non-judgement and focused awareness of the present moment. Both movement and meditation are essential to the Empowered Over Pain program and are easily practiced at home as well.

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## Diet and Chronic Pain

LuAnn Scarton, RDN, LDN, CLT, Integrative-Functional Nutritionist

When we are suffering from chronic pain, the foods we eat may be the last thing we consider changing. We may not see the direct relationship our diet may have in our chronic pain. Our Standard American Diet (SAD diet) is quite pro-inflammatory. This diet causes our immune system to activate with chemical messages, which can trigger pain to get our attention. The SAD diet is characterized by more frequent intakes of red/processed meat, saturated/trans-fat, refined grains, sugar, beer, and spirits.

Several therapeutic diets have been studied to help reduce chronic pain, including Anti-Inflammatory/Mediterranean, Plant Based/Vega, Caloric Restriction/Fasting, Elimination Diets, & Ketogenic diets. Other approaches include the use of nutraceuticals, like B vitamins, Curcumin, or Omega 3's. Oftentimes digestive disorders & other inflammatory diseases can complicate the issue of chronic pain. If you are interested in trying an Anti-Inflammatory diet approach to determine if your diet is contributing to your pain, working with a nutritional professional who is knowledgeable on the best approach for your condition will save you time & energy to lead you to a reduction in systemic inflammation.

For more information, try the [Anti-Inflammatory Diet for Beginners](#) or a few of our favorite recipes that incorporate potent anti-inflammatory ingredients.

## Empowered Over Pain continued...

Our pilot group participants found the biopsychosocial approach and movement and meditation practices to be helpful for both their pain management and overall daily well-being. Future Empowered Over Pain groups are planned for 2024. Please reach out to the Center for Integrative Medicine at 412-623-3023 to inquire if you are interested. For most people, these visits can be billed to health insurance and offer a feasible and cost-effective approach to manage chronic pain conditions.

### References:

1. IOM. Relieving Pain in America: A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education, and Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 2011.
2. Rikard SM et. al. Chronic Pain Among Adults — United States, 2019–2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:379–385.
3. Nahin RL et. al. Estimated Rates of Incident and Persistent Chronic Pain Among US Adults, 2019-2020. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023.
4. Zelaya CE et. al. Chronic Pain and High-impact Chronic Pain Among U. S. Adults, 2019. *CDC National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief*, No. 390, November 2019.
5. Tick H et. al. Pain Task Force of the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health. *Explore: The Journal of Science & Healing*. 14(3): 177-211, 2018 May-Jun.
6. Schubiner H and Betzold M. *Unlearn your Pain: A 28 Day Process to Reprogram Your Brain*. Mind Body Publishing. 2010.

## Golden Smoothie Recipe

6 ingredients—5 min—1 serving

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup Lite Coconut Milk
- 1 cup Frozen Pineapple
- 1/2 Banana (frozen)
- 1/2 Zucchini (chopped, peeled, frozen)
- 1 1/2 tsps. Ginger (fresh, minced)
- 1 tsp Turmeric

### Notes:

Zucchini can be replaced with frozen cauliflower or diced avocado  
Fresh Ginger can be replaced with powdered ginger instead, reduce to 1/2 per serving.

### Directions:

Place all ingredients in your blender and blend until smooth. Pour a glass and enjoy!



## Interested in Tai Chi?

Would you like to improve your circulation, coordination, posture, balance and strength?

Tai Chi is great for those looking to supplement other movement disciplines or sports. This slow, deliberate Martial Art can aid stress and pain management by strengthening the mind-body connection. Lessons are scaled to each person's fitness level and goals.

All sessions are held at the Center for Integrative Medicine!

Give us a call to sign up! 412-623-3023

# UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

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## Welcome to the Family!

Help us in welcoming the newest members to the Center for Integrative Medicine!

**Angelica Singh** is a craniosacral therapist and somatic educator with 22 years of experience in the mind/body field of study. She is a thought leader whose pathbreaking healing paradigm, The Embodiment Process™ has been featured in "O, The Oprah Magazine" and offered at the UCLA Medical Center. Her work has been facilitating individuals, groups, and institutions in embodiment, trauma resolution, and mindfulness. As a craniosacral therapist, Angelica specializes in resolving challenging pain and nervous system syndromes including anxiety, migraines, TMJ, and insomnia. She has been a leader in bringing trauma-informed paradigms to the fields of health care, wellness, and academia through her work as Co-Founder of the organization *Embodying Your Practice™* and *Embodying Your Curriculum™*. As a practitioner of the somatic modalities of *Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy*, pre- and peri-natal birth trauma work, somatic counseling, and yoga, Singh has facilitated hundreds of individuals on their journeys of emotional and physical healing to resolve elusive and challenging mind/body issues.



**Eric Stern** is a Licensed Professional Counselor, trained trauma-informed EMDR clinician with extensive experience in mindfulness, person-centered, dialectic behavior therapy and cognitive behavior therapeutic approaches. Eric Stern has a humanistic academic background, studying philosophy at U.C. Berkeley, with a Masters of Fine Arts in painting and sculpture from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and received his MSCP in counselling from Chatham University in 2017.



We

# Welcome

you to call and schedule with any or all of our wonderful practitioners!

## Interested in Semi-Private Yoga groups?

We have openings!

There are 2 openings in our Intermediate Yoga 1 class on Wednesday's from 11am-12:30pm (this class is for those who have achieved some proficiency in yoga and are interested in deeper aspects of Yoga Science; pranayama (breathing exercises) are more advanced and asanas.)

There are also 2 openings in our Beginner 2 Yoga class on Wednesday's from 1pm-2:30pm (this class is more challenging & requires ability to work on the floor with ease, some flexibility, strength, & fair balance.)

All groups are held at the Center for Integrative Medicine!

Give us a call to sign up! 412-623-3023

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## Research Opportunities

### Researchers Need Help on Study of Low Back Pain

The University of Pittsburgh is conducting a research study to better understand the contributors of low back pain. We are looking for adults who have experienced low back pain for **more than 3 months** in the last 6 months. We are also looking for adults who have **not** sought treatment for low back pain in the last 12 months.

Are you interested?

See if you qualify by going to [lb3p.pitt.edu](http://lb3p.pitt.edu), call 412-459-6719, or email [lowbackpainstudy@pitt.edu](mailto:lowbackpainstudy@pitt.edu)



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## UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine Team

Ronald Glick, MD, *Medical Director*

Carol Greco, PhD, *Research Director*

### **Administration**

Brittany Kail, BSBA  
*Administrative Manager*

Kathy Hecht  
*Administrative Assistant*

Emily Meyers  
*Administrative Assistant*

Heather Vardzel  
*Administrative Assistant*

### **Research**

Carol Greco, PhD  
*Research Director, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Certified MBSR Instructor*

### **Practitioners**

Kelly Beck, PhD  
*MBSR Instructor*

Sari Cohen, ND  
*Naturopathic Doctor*

Deborah Grice Conway, PhD  
*Psychotherapist*

Amanda Hunt, LAc  
*Acupuncturist*

Barbara Ivanko, LCSW  
*MBSR Instructor*

Jessie V. Larson, LMT  
*Massage Therapist*

Khara Lucius, ND  
*Naturopathic Doctor*

David Lesondak, BCSI  
*Structural Integrator, Myofascial Specialist*

Daniel Miller, DC  
*Chiropractor*

Angie Phares, PA  
*Integrative Health Coach*

Dezza Pastor, ATSI, E-RYT  
*Structural Integrator*

LuAnn Scarton, RDN, LDN, CLT  
*Integrative-Functional Nutritionist*

Angelica Singh, MA, BCST  
*Craniosacral Therapist*

Tricia Smith, LAc, MAc  
*Acupuncturist*

Eric Stern, LPC  
*EMDR Trauma Therapist*

K.K. Teh, LAc, MAc  
*Acupuncturist*

Alicja W. Walczak, MS, CRS  
*Biofeedback, Yoga Instructor*

Craig Weimer, DC  
*Chiropractor*

Jonathan Wilson,  
*Tai Chi Instructor*