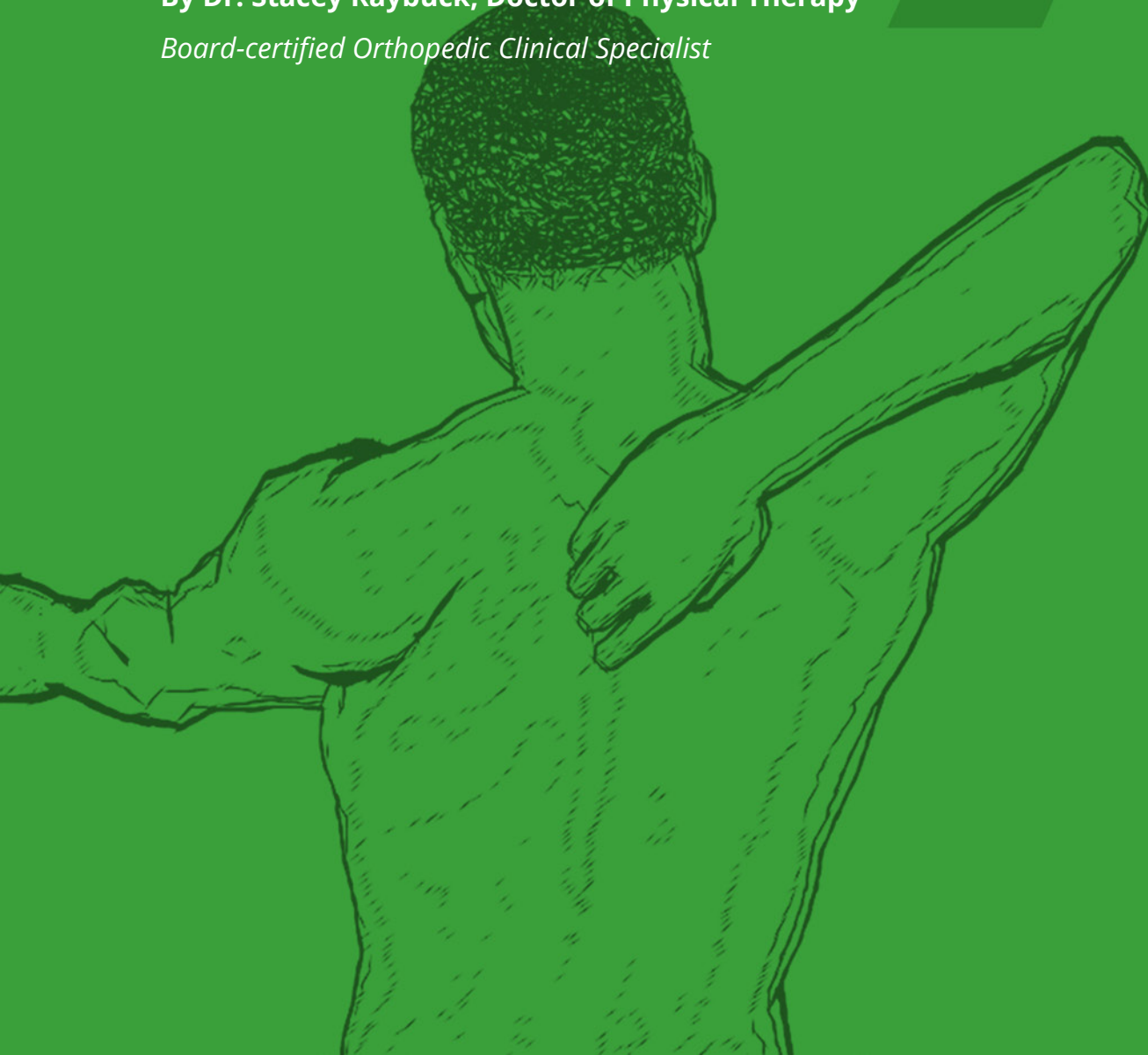


# 7 SECRETS TO PERMANENT RELIEF OF NECK & BACK ARTHRITIS

By Dr. Stacey Raybuck, Doctor of Physical Therapy  
*Board-certified Orthopedic Clinical Specialist*



# **The 7 Secrets to Permanent Relief for Neck & Back Arthritis**

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## Joint Pain is a Sign...That This is Happening to You

Pain is a sign. It is a sign that says, "Hey, hold up, there's something wrong here." It is a sign that you have tissue damage.

"Arthritis" literally means, "joint inflammation."

*When you feel pain, there are three things you can do:*

### 1. You Can Ignore It.

For most people, this involves making excuses. Here are some of my favorites:

"I'm old."

"It's Arthritis."

"It's the weather."

"My Mom had a bad back."

Simply put, repeating excuses will not help you heal. Excuses only put the blame and responsibility of the health of your body on someone else.

### 2. You Can Try to Cover It Up.

For people who try to handle pain this way, they usually try to cover it up with medications, injections, or unnecessary surgery (there are some surgeries which are absolutely necessary). These rarely address the cause of the joint pain. We will talk more about this later.

### 3. You Can Handle It.

People who handle arthritic pain best, handle it early. This means if they have a pain, they may wait a few days or a week, but if the pain persists, they seek for the best specialists in their area and follow the advice.

If you are a person who handles problems early, so they do not get worse, then you will want to read the section on "How to Find the Best PT in Your Area."

*"A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how by his own thought to derive benefit from his illnesses." - Hippocrates*

## What is the Single Best Exercise to Do, If You Could Only Pick One?

Walking is by far the single best exercise for long term neck and back health. People who walk 30 minutes or more 6 days a week, enjoy many benefits:

- Better heart health
- Improved mood and self esteem
- Improved concentration and brain power
- Longer life
- Better spine health

Q: How does walking lead to a healthier spine?

A: Every time you take a step, the spine goes through a small, up and down oscillation (think of an accordion going in and out). The space between the bones in your back does not have a blood supply. So it relies on the up and down movement with walking, jogging or running for nutrients... and for better health.

Swimming and biking have been shown to have similar effects.

*"Walking is man's best medicine." - Hippocrates*

## Think Strengthening for Your "Stretches"

Arthritis, and more specifically osteoarthritis (where pain is in one or more specific joints), usually results from weakness and instability of muscles which control the joint.

15 years ago, the big fad was to do stretches to help arthritis. Recent research on arthritis of the hip, knee, neck and lower back demonstrates that exercises which improve strength are the most effective at reducing joint pain and instability.

"What's the difference between stretching and strengthening?"

Stretching exercises are usually held for 15 seconds or longer. Think yoga.

Strengthening exercises usually involve repetitions. Think calisthenics (squats, push-ups) or resistance with bands or weights.

*"All parts of the body which have a function, if used in moderation and exercised in labors in which each is accustomed, become thereby healthy, well developed and age more slowly, but if unused they become liable to disease, defective in growth and age quickly." -Hippocrates*

## How to Find the Best PT in Your Area for Neck and Back Arthritis

Successful Physical Therapy treatment for neck and back arthritis involves 5 things:

- 1.** Skilled, hands-on PT with a Licensed PT and PTA- no aides, trainers, or other unlicensed staff should work with you.
- 2.** Strengthening, motion, and stability exercises that are monitored, progressed, and modified by a PT and PTA (again, no aides, trainers, or other unlicensed staff).
- 3.** Traction (when appropriate). This may also be called Decompression or Inversion therapy. Ask if the clinic has traction therapy.
- 4.** Focus on education, prevention, tips and tricks, and communication.
- 5.** Minimal use of modalities- while some pain and anti-inflammatory modalities can be beneficial for relief of severe pain, you should not be spending much time on hot packs, ice packs, or receiving massages and Ultrasound therapy. Make sure your therapist has conducted a thorough evaluation, discussed treatment options with you, and is adjusting/progressing/modifying your treatment based on your status.

The key is that per recent survey, only 10% of all therapists in the United States do the specific type of therapy which is shown in research to be the best at long term relief for arthritis in the neck and back.

So how do you find the best PT in your area? When I answer this for people I recommend:

When you call a clinic, ask some general questions: Do they have appointment times that work, are they in-network with your insurance, can they schedule you within a few days, do they use any aides, trainers, or unlicensed staff, do they have traction, is the location convenient, is the atmosphere clean, supportive, friendly? If you aren't sure, visit the clinic and ask for a tour and get a sense of if it "feels right". If you make a bad choice, go get a second opinion from another therapist. I also advise that you ask if the clinic is owned by a physical therapist because you want the people responsible for your care to be in charge of all aspects of your care.

You want a physical therapist who is using the latest techniques proven in the research to be the best for you. Ask for recommendations from friends, family, and others in the medical profession. Also, therapists who are members of the APTA (American Physical Therapy Association) and have advanced skills, training, and degrees are more likely to be focused on evidence-supported care. So, this is another thing to ask/ look for when you are doing your research.

## **Who Said, "We Are What We Eat?"**

OK, the guy who said the above, I never heard of before.

It was Hippocrates who said, "*Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.*"

Here are four fantastic books on how what we eat effects our health (one is by a nutritionist, one a family doctor in New Jersey who has been on Dr. Oz, one a doctor at the Cleveland clinic, one a doctor at Cornell):

1. The Maker's Diet, by Jordan Rubin
2. Eat to Live, by Dr. Joel Fuhrman
3. You Can Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease, by Dr. Caldwell Essylsten
4. The China Study, by T. Colin Campbell

## **Three Things You Should Avoid to Keep Your Joints the Healthiest**

This may be the most controversial, but medications, injections, and surgery frequently cause long term damage. This is especially true when they are given when not needed.

*Here is why:*

1. Medication, especially muscle relaxants, pain killers and anti-inflammatories, block the minds ability to perceive pain. Certainly medication has its place. As a nation, we frequently overuse and block the pain signal. This leads to not addressing the cause of the pain, which leads to more joint damage.
2. Injections, especially cortisone and epidurals. When physical therapy fails, then there is a place for injections. But when given before PT, and especially in a series of more than one, injections decrease joint health.
3. Surgery, specifically spinal fusions, lead to stoppage of joint movement. This essentially kills and fuses the joint. It frequently leads to arthritis and pain in the joints above and below the previous surgery.

## Don't Worry Be Happy?

In Malcolm Gladwell's book, *What the Dog Saw*, he refers to a little coal mining town in the Poconos where arthritis and heart disease were extremely rare in the town. What was the cause of this?

Genetics? No way! Most were Italian...

Exercise? No...

Occupation? No again...

Researchers and doctors concluded the reason for the almost non-existent rates of arthritis was because of the excellent family and neighbor relations most townspeople had. The community was tight knit. It was known as a super friendly place with good relationships.

Better relationships = less stress = better mental state = healthier joints and bodies.

***Best Wishes,***

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I hope this information is helpful for you. Please feel free to share this with anyone that might benefit. If we can be of service, let us know.

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