

BOTTOM LINE

Natural Healing

With Dr. Mark Stengler

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281 Tresser Boulevard,
Stamford, CT 06901-3229
203-973-5900

DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

Mark A. Stengler, NMD ■ Stengler Center for Integrative Medicine

LASERS THAT RELIEVE PAIN, LASERS THAT HEAL

Here's one kind of treatment that I'll bet your mainstream doctor doesn't recommend to you—cold laser therapy. Last year, I wrote about using this type of laser treatment for fat reduction. But cold laser therapy can do so much more than that.

Cold laser therapy, so called because it is unlike older types of lasers that use very hot, high-energy beams of light, also is known as low-level laser treatment (LLLT). I use LLLT in my clinic to relieve many types of musculoskeletal pain, including arthritis and strained or inflamed muscles, joints, tendons and ligaments. Because LLLT reduces inflammation and improves circulation, I also use it to treat conditions such as sinusitis...lymphedema (swelling due to a buildup of lymph fluid in an arm or a leg, which is particularly common after a mastectomy)...and tinnitus (a condition characterized by ringing in the ears). LLLT also has been shown to speed up wound healing and improve the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome. If you have any of these conditions, I urge you to look into LLLT.

HOW IT WORKS

One of the things that I really like about LLLT is that it is a nontoxic treatment with virtually no side effects. LLLT of one type or another has been in use for about 30 years, but the technology has become more effective and has increased in

popularity in recent years. In LLLT, laser light passes harmlessly into the body's tissues without heating them. LLLT devices deliver energy units called *photons* to damaged cells. This stimulates and increases the cells' metabolic activity and, in essence, brings them back to health.

LLLT uses different wavelengths to penetrate to varying depths—from just below the skin's surface to four to five inches deep. Depending on the area being treated, the therapy may employ one or more wavelengths during a treatment session. The laser in my clinic, like many others now in use, enables me to vary the frequency of wavelengths.

Once these photons reach their target depth, they produce a variety of effects that help reduce pain and accelerate healing by...

- Stimulating the molecules that cells burn for energy. This increases general cell health and enhances the cellular repair process. In particular, photons appear to increase the production of cells that promote tissue regeneration and wound healing.

- Reducing inflammation by inhibiting the body's production of inflammatory substances.

- Improving blood vessel dilation, which increases blood flow to the treated area.

- Inhibiting the pain-signaling activity of nerve cells.

- Increasing production of *serotonin*, the neurotransmitter associated with well-being.

- Enhancing immune activity in the area being treated.

Numerous studies have demonstrated LLLT's effectiveness. One 2009 study published in *The Lancet* was an analysis of 16 randomized controlled studies of LLLT for neck pain. The researchers concluded that patients were about 70% more likely to experience reduced pain following LLLT, compared with those given a placebo treatment. Similarly, a 2008 study published in *American Journal of Sports Medicine* found that recreational athletes with chronic Achilles tendinopathy who received LLLT combined with therapeutic exercises had faster recovery times. The laser group recovered after four weeks of treatment, compared with 12 weeks for the control group, which received no laser therapy.

When I use LLLT, I usually pass the laser over the affected area for five to 10 minutes per treatment. I often administer one to two treatments per week until symptoms resolve. Many people notice at least some improvement in pain, soreness and stiffness after just one treatment, and 90% of my patients notice a significant reduction in pain within two to three

Mark A. Stengler, NMD, is a naturopathic medical doctor and leading authority on the practice of alternative and integrated medicine. Dr. Stengler is author of the *Bottom Line Natural Healing* newsletter, author of *The Natural Physician's Healing Therapies* (Bottom Line Books), founder and medical director of the Stengler Center for Integrative Medicine in Encinitas, California, and adjunct associate clinical professor at the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Oregon. www.DrStengler.com.

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treatments. Benefits can last from weeks to months depending on the individual and the problem being treated. If desired, LLLT also can be used in conjunction with other therapies, such as physical therapy, anti-inflammatory medications and acupuncture. Laser treatments for conditions such as sinusitis and tinnitus work similarly.

HOW LLLT COULD HELP YOU

For patients with acute or chronic pain, LLLT often is my first choice when it comes to treatment options.

Take Susan, for example. This 65-year-old patient had severe bursitis in her hip. She was in so much pain that she had to walk with a cane. Another doctor had recommended a cortisone injection to relieve the pain, but she wanted

to see what other treatments were available. There was no question in my mind that LLLT would help her. After just one treatment, her symptoms improved dramatically. After three treatments, she felt so much better and had such increased mobility that she no longer needed the cane.

Here's another example. Joe, 40 years old, had had acute sinusitis for two days. He was very uncomfortable because of the pressure-like pain in his head. In addition to treating him with nutritional supplements for sinusitis, I also performed a laser treatment. His symptoms cleared up immediately. For the next four hours, mucus drained from his nostrils, relieving his symptoms completely.

LLLT typically costs \$50 to \$75 per session. Some health insurance

companies cover it. Many naturopathic doctors, physiotherapists, chiropractors and acupuncturists, as well as some holistic medical doctors, are trained in LLLT. When choosing a practitioner, ask whether he/she has attended formal seminars in this type of therapy.

People with cancerous tumors should not have this treatment because it may aggravate their condition. Lasers have not been tested on pregnant women.

References

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