**Excusing the pain away?**

As I twist and turn and “ouch” and “ooo,” I take note of which parts of my body are hurting today. It’s an amusing comparison when I finally get with a few of my friends and we take stock of our sore muscles and joints. Some of the soreness brought on ourselves, through a recent exercise and others that are categorized by us as “due to getting older.” Is it smart to excuse the pain away?

Pain is a crazy thing. It’s the body’s way of getting our attention to let us know that something is wrong. Most of us know our bodies well enough to be able to decipher the differences in the pain we experience; whether it is pain from a new activity, an illness or from a bad burrito. There is a difference and it’s important to know what’s ok to excuse away and what is not.

Acute pain is sudden pain. For it to be classified as ‘acute’ it must be pain, ranging from mild to severe, that last for days, weeks or months. In most cases acute pain does not last longer than six months and it disappears when the underlying cause of pain has been treated or has healed.

Acute pain that doesn’t go away becomes chronic pain. When pain becomes chronic it means that pain signals have remained active in the nerves for weeks, months or years and have probably reached a physically debilitating state.

The physical effects of chronic pain can include tense muscles, limited mobility, a lack of energy and changes in appetite. There are even emotional effects caused by chronic pain and these include depression, anger, anxiety and fear of re-injury therefore limiting a person’s ability to return to a normal life.

The unexpected pain and the pain where the source is not understood is what you should never excuse away. Examples of this kind of pain include severe headaches which could indicate something serious happening in your brain. Pain or discomfort in the chest, throat, jaw, shoulder, arm or abdomen which are known signs of a cardiac concerns. Severe abdominal pain could mean problems with your appendix, gallbladder, pancreas, stomach ulcers and intestinal blockages. Calf pain could be a sign of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) which is a blood clot that can occur deep in the leg’s veins. Burning feet or legs could be a sign of undiagnosed diabetes.

Pay attention to vague, combined or medically unexplained pains. It’s the entire pain package that is important to not excuse away.

We can’t always ‘excuse’ away the aches and pains that come with aging joints and muscles. We have painful conditions that we live with and can control on a daily basis. Arthritis is a great example, which is an inflammation of the joints that causes a lot of pain all the time.

Pain brought on by a new activity or a possible injury is the easiest to excuse. Just make sure to pay attention to the soreness because your body is telling you that it is hurting, and something could be broken.

Utilize some of the healing techniques that will allow that acute pain to heal quicker and get you back to the activities you want. Believe it or not, movement is one of the most important healing tools for soreness and pain. It gets the circulation going and helps the joints and muscles to heal faster. Stretching works the same way. Use ice during the immediate acute stage, switching to heat later to increase circulation. Rest is also important for repairing and healing. The use of an anti-inflammatory over the counter medication can also help for temporary relief of pain and discomfort.

A physical therapist is a great contact and source to use to help through acute and chronic pain.

Rule-of-thumb for pain is to let pain be your guide. If it hurts more and increases the pain during activity, then don’t do it. Moderate your world so that pain is manageable.

Often the aches and pains make aging and activity no fun and encourages us to be sedentary. Don’t let that happen. Stay active. Keep exercising and you’ll find your older self in a better place when you get there.