**“For most back pain, the best treatment is non-medical” (1)**

Is it a coincidence that I just read extensive articles about chronic back pain (2) in The Economist (January 2020), a worldwide audience weekly magazine and in a French one, Sciences et Avenir (February 2020)? May be not.

Non-specific (3) chronic back pain is a major public health concern in “developed” countries, leading to tremendous financial costs and, alas, no result on most cases. On the patient’s side costs are also tremendous but in another way; intense pain, cessation of professional activity, withdrawal from social life, interruption of sports practice all leading to a miserable life and sometimes depression.

Back pain, as other pains, is experienced in the brain, when triggered for a specific reason and then stops when the stimuli is not active anymore. However, when the pain becomes chronic, researchers suggest that the pain’s “alarm switch” stays on, as if it had been damaged, suggesting that the recurring pain might be linked to other aspects of personal life. It is also suggested by S. Mc Mahon from King’s College London (1) after discovering that the development of specific drugs for chronic pain has a poor record, as patients on the trial had a range of other problems.

Evidence of ineffectiveness of widely prescribed treatments, such as operations and drugs, has not yet deterred doctors to doing so because this is actually what most insurances do reimburse. The claimed lack of evidence concerning the effect of alternative therapies is the reason for their shy promotion by the medical body. However, yoga and yoga therapy are gaining recognition and some complementary insurances do now reimburse part of the costs.

Many studies (available on line) on yoga and chronic back pain are showing the positive effect of a specific practice. In the USA the benefits of yoga on a number of issues (back pain, pain management, fibromyalgia, support during cancers…) has already been demonstrated and in France yoga therapy is steadily spreading as an alternative support treatment for many pathologies.

Yoga in the management of back pain has nothing to do with the yoga promoted on Instagram pictures where acrobatic asanas (postures) are performed by young sexy athletes!

Yoga therapy sessions are gentle and tailored to the need of the client. They include breath, movement, meditation and visualization. These last two are very powerful to engage the mind in the process of healing, like athletes use it to prepare for a competition, or musicians to rehearse a piece of music for example.

In the case of chronic back pain, the goal is to reconciliate with the body through a better understanding of the causes that lead to the onset and chronicity of the pain and to implement tools that will bring long lasting relief. The specificity of yoga therapy is its holistic approach. In that regard, yoga supports S. Mc Mahon’s statement. Engaging in the process, both physically and mentally, means that changes take place deep inside and affect different aspects of life therefore ensuring long term results.

*1 Source: The Economist – January 18th 2020*

*2 A back pain is qualified chronic if it lasts more than 6 to 8 weeks*

*3 Non-specific back pain is defined as not attributable to any recognizable or known specific pathology*

*(e.g. infection, tumor, osteoporosis)*