

# The Palm Beach Post

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## REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

### Pain, pain, go away ... Before you pop a pill, check into new treatments

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Whoever decided that life's only certainties were death and taxes missed one: pain!

Just as none of us gets out of this life, uh ... well, alive, neither do we escape physical pain.

Be it disease, traumatic injury, chronic pain, degenerative condition or some combination of all of the above, at some point, we all suffer.

It's no surprise, then, that pain relief is a \$650 billion industry.

Americans ingest untold amounts of narcotics in the hope of relieving — however temporarily — whatever ails us.



*Eva Andrich, 42, traveled here from Munich, Germany to receive treatments at Laser Medica for severe chronic neck, back and shoulder pain. After undergoing 10 sessions, Andrich reported, 'I now feel so good, it's like I've been reborn.'*



Dr. Joseph Costello, founder of Laser Medica, treats patients suffering from a wide array of painful conditions with non-invasive laser therapy.

There's got to be a better — or at least *different* — way, right?

Several actually.

September is national Pain Awareness Month, so here are some new treatments for what hurts.

### **Laser therapy: Helping the body work better**

Laser therapy has long been used for everything from gum and eye surgery to tattoo removal and hair restoration.

And in recent years, it's gained a growing following as a pure pain-relief protocol.

Dr. Joseph Costello, the founder of Laser Medica in Palm Beach Gardens, has treated patients from all over the world.



Richard Graulich

Palm Beach Gardens neurosurgeon Dr. Charles Theofolis uses stem cell therapy as a non-surgical protocol for patients seeking relief from chronic back pain. (Richard Graulich / The Palm Beach Post)

Orthopedic conditions.

Soft-tissue injuries.

Autoimmune diseases.

He's seen them all (and more), and says that his highly energized, non-invasive, targeted laser therapy can provide lasting relief from a vast range of maladies.

Sessions typically last 30 minutes, and patients experience no negative side effects.

“The lasers we use are classified as an ‘actinotherapy,’” which means they reduce inflammation and boost the body’s natural defenses against fluid build-up and germs, enabling patients to heal at a deeper, cellular level, Costello explains.



*Dominique Aristondo, who has owned the renowned Dominique Boutique in Coral Gables for more than 40 years, had her toenail fungus completely cleared up via side-effects-free treatments done at Laser Medica.*

Jennifer Spitznagel, 55, of Delray Beach, certainly believes in the Laser Medica protocol. After tearing her meniscus while playing tennis, she wanted to try conservative treatment that would enable her to avoid surgery.

“I felt relief after the very first treatment,” she says.

Eva Andrich, 42, is another fan. The Munich, Germany resident — who had been suffering with debilitating chronic, neck, back and shoulder pain, traveled here so she could undergo a 10-session protocol. Her verdict: “I now feel so good, it’s like I’ve been reborn.”

Costello doesn’t promise miracles, but rather says, “For any kind of acute or chronic pain, the surgical option will always be there, so why not come to Laser Medica first and at least let us try to help you.”

### **Physiatry: Helping you move without pain**

Experts in nerves, muscles and bones, physiatrists are medical doctors who treat illnesses and/or injuries that affect how one moves.

One of South Florida’s leading physiatrists, Dr. Craig Lichtblau, the founding medical director of the Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit of St. Mary’s Medical Center, says his

primary goals when treating patients are “to decrease pain and increase function. We want to help patients reintegrate into life’s normal activities.”



Bruce Bennett

*In 2012, Hannah Huntoon (left) was severely injured in an accident while ‘car surfing.’ She was treated for more than six months by physiatrist Dr. Craig Lichtblau (right), the founding Medical Director of the Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit of St. Mary’s Medical Center. ‘Hannah had one foot in death’s door,’ said Lichtblau. ‘She has had a remarkable recovery.’ (Bruce R. Bennett/The Palm Beach Post)*

He, and his staff of 30 rehabilitation experts, do this via “physical medicine”: physical and occupational therapy; range-of-motion exercises; non-steroidal, trigger-point injections; and, when necessary, oral medications.

Among the devices at Lichtblau’s disposal are M6 lasers (similar to Costello’s devices) and intradiscal decompression (IDD) machines.



*At his North Palm Beach practice, physiatrist Dr. Craig Lichtblau helps patients recover from a wide variety of painful, limiting conditions via non-invasive protocols.*

Lichtblau has successfully treated thousands of patients during his nearly three decades in practice. One of his most well-known cases was that of Hannah Huntoon — a then-16-year-old Palm Beach Gardens High School sophomore who was critically injured in a “car-surfing” accident in 2012.

“Hannah had one foot in death’s door,” says Lichtblau of the teen who had part of her skull surgically removed in response to brain swelling.

But, after six months of intensive therapy at his North Palm Beach facility, “She made a remarkable recovery — and has since graduated from high school.”

Lichtblau stresses that patients need not be in critical shape to benefit from physiatry. For instance, “We help improve the lives of elderly patients with degenerative osteoarthritis all the time.”

Lichtblau’s motto is that “pain is inevitable — but suffering is optional.”

## Interventional pain medicine: Blocking the pain pathways



*Jennifer Spitznagel, 55, of Delray Beach suffered a torn meniscus in her knee while playing tennis. Preferring conservative treatment to surgery, she went to Laser Medica, where she said, 'I got relief after the very first treatment.'*



*Interventional pain-management physician Dr. Ira Fox uses a fluoroscope machine to guide him to just the right spot to inject patients with pain-blocking local anesthetics.*

Dr. Ira Fox, the co-founder of Anesthesia Pain Care Consultants, is one of South Florida's pioneers in the practice of interventional pain medicine — targeting specific pain sites and blocking pain signals to the spot.

“With our background in anesthesia, and additional specialized training in pain management, we're able to bridge the gap between minimally invasive, and non-invasive, techniques for relieving pain,” Fox explains.

Using high-tech digital imaging, Fox pinpoints the site, and likely cause, of chronic pain. He then determines the best strategic spot to make a small injection in order to block the brain's pain “signals” from traveling through the spine.

Sometimes this means injecting at the exact site of the pain; other times, it means injecting in a spot that's removed from the area that hurts — but is connected to the neural pathway.

“Either way, we want to provide immediate and long-lasting relief for chronic pain,” he says.

Former Miami Dolphins wide receiver and current radio broadcaster Jimmy Cefalo is a passionate proponent of Fox's modalities.

## **Stem cell therapy**

Though more study is needed to establish how well stem cell therapy works for pain relief, some local physicians have adopted the method — with encouraging anecdotal results.

For example, Palm Beach Gardens neurosurgeon Dr. Charles Theofilos has injected patients' own stem cells into their spines as an alternative to major back surgery.

One of Theofilos' patients, 76-year-old Pat Rooney Sr., told The [Palm Beach Post](#) last [month](#) that the procedure had alleviated his debilitating back pain, allowing the former president of the Palm Beach Kennel Club to resume playing golf.

As with the other non-invasive therapies, Theofilos believes “there’s really no downside.” And, while it won’t necessarily help everyone, “It’s worth a try before you have surgery.”