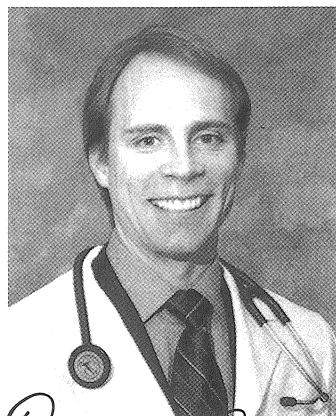


BOTTOM LINE
Natural Healing
 With Dr. Mark Stengler
 DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

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Dr. Mark Stengler

On a personal note...

A MERICANS SPEND CLOSE TO \$200 BILLION each year on prescription drugs. In 1986, there were fewer than 900 prescription medications on the market...now there are more than 8,000! The total is even higher when you add over-the-counter drugs.

To help people better understand common pharmaceuticals, I have cowritten with James Balch, MD, and Robin Young-Balch, ND, a book called *Prescription for Drug Alternatives*. In it, we explain how drugs work and the dangers to watch out for.

Sneak preview...

■ **Side effects:** Calcium channel blockers, used for lowering blood pressure, may cause breathing problems and heart failure.

■ **Nutrition:** The diabetes drug *metformin* (Glucophage) may deplete B vitamins, leaving you feeling tired.

■ **Drug-drug interactions:** Taking the migraine medication *sumatriptan* (Imitrex) with anti-depressants may cause agitation, shivering and tremors.

■ **Drug-nutrient interactions:** Calcium supplements may slow the absorption of thyroid drugs.

The book also includes natural alternatives to pharmaceuticals. It will be available this fall. ■

New Pain Relief: INFRARED LIGHT

CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS, SUCH AS ARTHRITIS, low-back pain, fibromyalgia and others, can leave sufferers in near-constant pain. Managing this ongoing discomfort is a huge challenge for patients and their doctors. Pain medications, such as ibuprofen, often bring relief, but long-term use can cause gastric bleeding and other troubling side effects.

At last, patients have a better option—a new noninvasive pain-relief therapy that has no side effects. The technology is called *far infrared (FIR) light therapy*, and it is delivered via a pad similar to a standard heating pad. The technology is available in special pads for home use, and an increasing number of medical practitioners are using FIR therapy in their offices.

I recently began prescribing this gentle, nontoxic therapy for arthritis patients, as well as patients with muscle, neck or back pain...lymphedema (swelling of arms and/or legs due to inadequate draining of lymph fluid)...peripheral neuropathy (nerve damage sometimes caused by uncontrolled diabetes)...carpal tunnel syndrome...and other conditions. So far, I have seen the technology produce some remarkable results—greatly reducing pain and stiffness after just a few treatments.

One of the first patients I treated with FIR therapy was a 68-year-old woman who had chronic low-back pain from arthritis and several degenerated discs. According to her conventional physician, her only treatment choices were cortisone injections or surgery. I

thought FIR therapy might help her. For five consecutive days, she came to my office to spend 35 minutes lying on an infrared pad. She felt so much improvement that she

decided to purchase her own infrared pad to keep up the treatments at home. The pain she thought was permanent has virtually disappeared.

Another patient, a 51-year-old woman who suffered from chronic fibromyalgia, had terrible pain all over her body. The pain was so severe that she couldn't get a good night's sleep. I recommended that she purchase an infrared pad to use every evening before bed. After her first treatment, she was able to sleep through the night—and after months of regular use, she sleeps soundly.

HOW FIR GOES FURTHER

Certainly, light and heat therapy are not new—various forms have been around for centuries. But FIR therapy is different because it uses infrared light (one of the types delivered by the sun). Infrared light is made up of three different wavelengths, referred to as near, medium and far. The far wavelength, used in FIR therapy, is the most compatible with human tissue. That is because FIR light vibrates at the same frequency as human cells, so it is readily absorbed.

Like the sun, FIR light also produces heat, a critical factor in the therapy. But do not confuse this technology and its results with those of ordinary

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heating pads.

How FIR therapy is unique...

■ Rather than heating just the surface of the skin, infrared heat penetrates as far as 2.3 inches under the skin to reach muscles, blood vessels, lymphatic glands and nerves.

■ The body works to create a steady temperature throughout—so when the infrared heat raises the temperature in a particular area, blood rushes in to normalize it, carrying with it additional oxygen and nutrients. This helps improve lymphatic flow, allowing the body's lymphatic system to excrete waste products, and reduces edema (swelling caused by fluid retention).

■ The increased circulation also helps regenerate tissue—for example, in the tendons associated with tennis elbow.

■ FIR therapy helps clear out toxins, such as *lactic acid*, which contribute to inflammation in the body.

■ FIR heat improves the ability of collagen (a type of connective tissue) to stretch. This is especially valuable when treating ligaments, tendons and other soft tissue for range-of-motion problems.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE TREATMENT

In the early 1980s, a Canadian veterinarian named Joseph Bender, DVM, first came up with the idea of harnessing FIR technology into therapy pads. He used it successfully to address repetitive stress injuries in horses—and soon the technology was expanded to personal products for human use.

Today the largest manufacturer of FIR therapy pads is Thermotex Therapy Systems Ltd. in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. I spoke with a representative of the company, who told me that the technology is being used by a growing number of different types of medical practitioners...

Physical therapists—to increase circulation and prepare soft issue for treatment, such as range-of-motion exercises...to relieve pain and stiffness

from frozen shoulder syndrome...to soothe plantar fasciitis, a chronic inflammation of the connective tissue that runs along the bottom of the foot...and to treat a variety of other ailments.

Chiropractors—to relax muscles in the back and relieve spasms.

Sports trainers (including trainers for professional teams, such as the Seattle Seahawks football team and the Calgary Flames hockey team)—to treat strains and sprains...tendinitis...lactic acid buildup, which is common among athletes...as well as simple sore muscles.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has accepted FIR therapy pads for registration as a medical device. *Note:* The FDA grants medical device registration based on safety, not effectiveness. It is true that no substantive studies have been done on FIR therapy. However, one small study performed at St. Boniface General Hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, produced extremely encouraging results. Forty-two patients who suffered from either rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis, along with low-back pain, were treated with FIR therapy pads for seven days. While that is less than the advised treatment time for best results, 65% of patients still reported that they felt very noticeable relief. The rest—most of whom had severe long-standing disease—continued treatment for two additional weeks. At the end of the study period, 87% of patients reported significant pain relief.

There is additional research in the works—in Canada, small trials are in the recruitment stage or in progress. They will evaluate the effectiveness of FIR therapy to treat 21 different conditions ranging from sciatica to Parkinson's disease.

WHAT TO EXPECT

According to Thermotex (800-975-0253, www.thermotex.com), the most popular pad for personal use is called the TTS Platinum. It has three flexible panels that are designed to fit over any

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Bottom Line Natural Healing™ is dedicated to empowering readers with the deepest understanding of natural and alternative therapies—and the knowledge to use them to stay well and heal disease.

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part of the body. The pads are powered by electricity. **Bonus:** The pads require only about 4% of the energy that is needed to run a standard heating pad. Over the life of the appliance, this means some savings on your electric bill, as well as benefits for the environment. The temperature of the pad rises to 104°F to 113°F (40°C to 45°C) versus the average temperature of 131°F (55°C) in ordinary heating pads. This means that the infrared pads are gentler on your skin, because they are less likely to burn or dry it out, even after extended use.

It is important to remember that FIR therapy can take time and commitment before patients will see results. You may experience some immediate relief, but more likely, it will take several weeks of regular treatments to see significant improvement.

Most patients who decide to try using FIR therapy pads have chronic problems that have existed sometimes for years, with symptoms that have settled deep into the body. As a result, it is not surprising that symptoms often improve slowly. Also, be aware that on rare occasions, FIR therapy may initially cause some mild discomfort—typically from inflammation—as toxins are released and flushed out by the body. **Good news:** I have not seen this with any of my patients.

Timing: Most people use the pads twice a day for 30 to 45 minutes per session. I recommend that you turn the unit to high for the first 15 minutes and then switch it to the low setting for the duration. I recommend the same treatment time for patients of different body weights and sizes. It is all right to use the pad more often or for longer periods of time.

Thermotex cautions that people who take prescription medications that make them more sensitive to sunlight, such as *tetracycline*, sulfa drugs and some chemotherapy agents, should not use FIR therapy.

Other cautions: People with adrenal suppression,

known as Addison's disease (in which the body's adrenal glands don't produce sufficient amounts of the stress hormone *cortisol*), should ask their doctors before using FIR therapy because their bodies do not properly regulate body temperature.

In the case of joint or muscle injury, do not use the pads for the first 48 hours or until any symptoms of acute inflammation have subsided.

When to Use Heat... When to Use Cold

When you have a new bruise, sprain or strain, it always is advisable to use cold first. As soon as possible after injury, apply a cold pack (a bag of frozen peas works as well as a standard ice pack) for a maximum of 20 minutes, three to five times a day, for 48 to 72 hours. Always put a thin cloth, such as a dish towel, between the cold pack and the skin—and remove the pack immediately if your skin starts to tingle or itch, as these may be signs of impending frostbite. Pay special attention when icing fingers and toes because they cool more rapidly. People with circulation problems—such as *Raynaud's phenomenon*, when blood vessels constrict causing toes, hands or fingers to turn blue—should avoid using cold treatments.

For chronic pain, use heat. Try a warm bath or shower, a heating pad or a warm compress (heat a wet washcloth in the microwave for about 10 seconds). Apply heat for 15 to 20 minutes, two or three times a day. For deeper penetration, you can use a FIR pad as directed. **Caution:** People with high blood pressure should not use heat, and anyone with heart disease, diabetes or thyroid problems should check with a doctor before using high-heat treatments, such as a Jacuzzi or a very warm bath.

People with hemophilia and other bleeding disorders should avoid using FIR therapy. Although metal implants have not been shown to heat from FIR therapy, if you have any, such as a rod or wire in your joint, talk to your doctor before placing the pad on it.

Anyone with hypertension should be cautious when using any kind of heat treatment—it dilates blood vessels and may affect blood pressure, although I have not seen this in any of my patients.

FIR therapy pads are fine for children, but with them—and anyone with sensitive skin—it is a good idea to place a towel over the pad before placing it on the skin.

MY BOTTOM LINE

In a few years, we will have more scientific evidence about FIR therapy, and I believe it will bear out the impressive results I have already seen. Until then, my patients' physical response to this technology has convinced me that it is certainly worth consideration for anyone seeking relief from the pain and stiffness of acute and chronic conditions. I particularly like FIR therapy for arthritis and fibromyalgia, as well as chronic ligament, tendon and muscle injuries.

The treatments are safe and relatively inexpensive. The pads start at \$79.50 for a wrist pad. The TTS Platinum model, the most popular and versatile, for use on most body parts, costs \$219. **An extra benefit:** My patients say that time spent on the pads is particularly soothing.

The Thermotex pads are sold by their national distributor, Active Forever (800-377-8033, www.activeforever.com). ■

