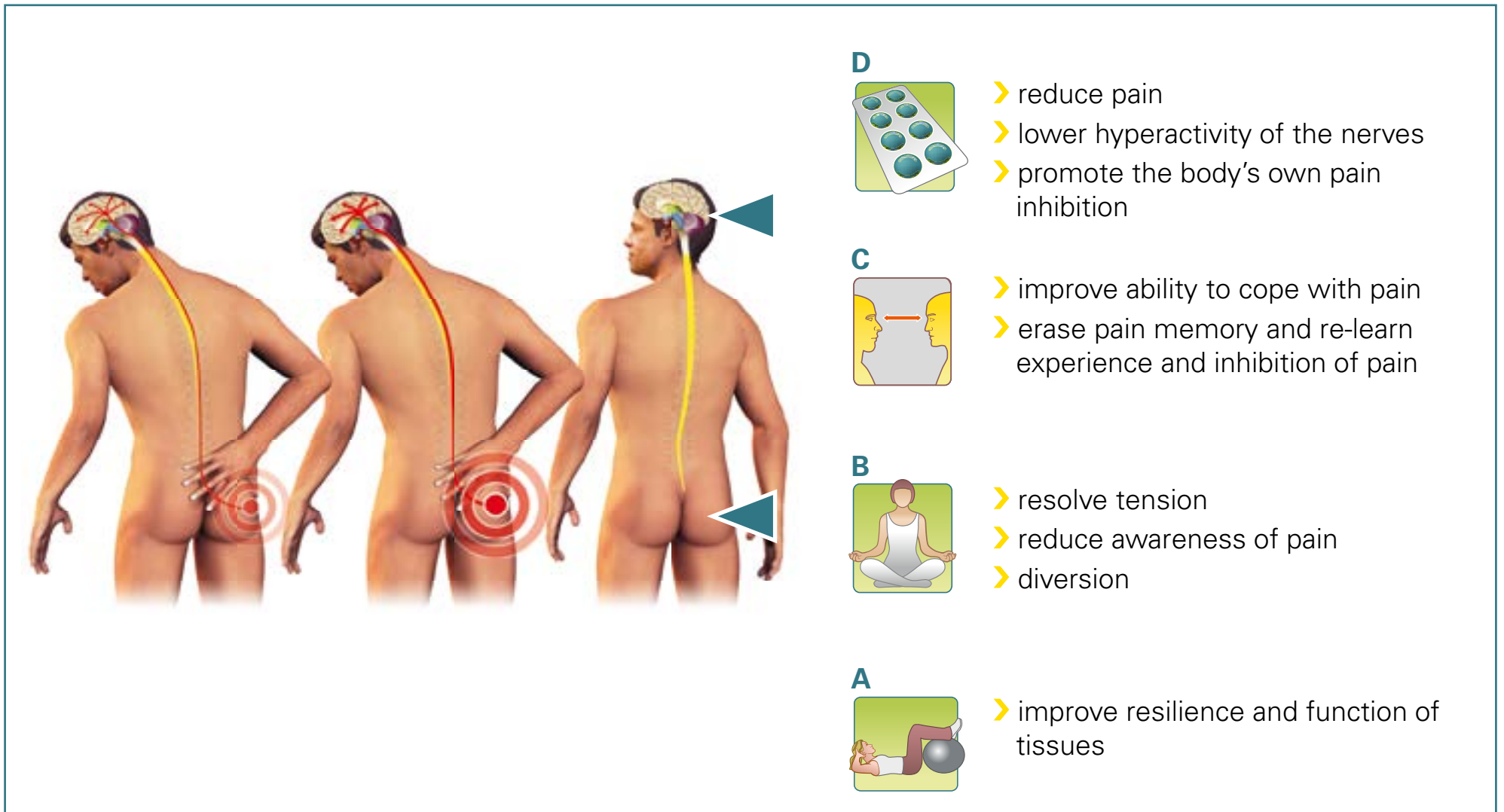


The treatment of chronic pain [1, 2]


➤ Long-term aim:
Resolving the neuroplastic changes in the nervous system

Therapeutic measures in chronic pain



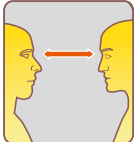
The diagram illustrates the treatment of chronic pain through four stages (A, B, C, D) and corresponding therapeutic measures. The stages are represented by three human figures from left to right, showing the progression of pain resolution. The first figure shows a person with a red target on their lower back, indicating the source of pain. The second figure shows the target fading, and the third figure shows the target completely resolved. The brain and spinal cord are highlighted in yellow, indicating the neuroplastic changes being addressed.

D




- reduce pain
- lower hyperactivity of the nerves
- promote the body's own pain inhibition

C




- improve ability to cope with pain
- erase pain memory and re-learn experience and inhibition of pain

B



- resolve tension
- reduce awareness of pain
- diversion

A



- improve resilience and function of tissues

The treatment of chronic pain [1, 2]

A Physical measures *

Activity and movement (stimulation, diversion, improved blood flow) have a positive impact on the body's own inhibition of pain.

In addition, the resilience and functional capacity of the tissues is increased, e.g. muscle or intervertebral discs.

B Relaxation

Relaxation techniques are very important in order to counter tensed muscles and lower the physiological excitation level. Reading, listening to music, meeting friends, meditating, dancing and going for walks are examples of effective techniques.

Special relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation or autogenic training are also effective. Relaxation must be learnt, and it cannot be forced!

C Psychotherapy [2]

Psychological pain therapy involves making **better use of one's own resources in dealing with pain than in the past**. Strategies for reducing the pain are learnt. In addition, it involves learning how to change ways of thinking and behaving that reinforce pain. The aim is for pain to dominate daily living less, and for other more important areas of life to become more central.

* It is important that patients always stretch before and after exercise or undertaking any physical activity. The benefits include improved flexibility and circulation, better posture, relief of stress and enhanced coordination.

D Medication

Early and adequate drug therapy for pain is essential in order to:

- reduce the permanent pain stimuli that cause neuroplastic changes (adaptations of the central nervous system),
- calm the hyperactive nerve fibres,
- support the body's own inhibition of pain.

In addition, pain relief with medication makes all other measures easier, as attention is no longer constantly focused on the pain.

The combination of physical, psychotherapeutic and drug treatment methods is referred to as **multimodal pain therapy**. It is generally carried out in an interdisciplinary context.

[1] Rice ASC et al. (series eds). London: Hodder Arnold, 2008. ISBN 0-340-80993-0.

[2] Recommended guidelines for Pain Management Programmes for adults. A consensus statement prepared on behalf of the British Pain Society. April 2007. Available at: www.britishpainsociety.org/book_pmp_main.pdf. [Last accessed 7th March 2013]