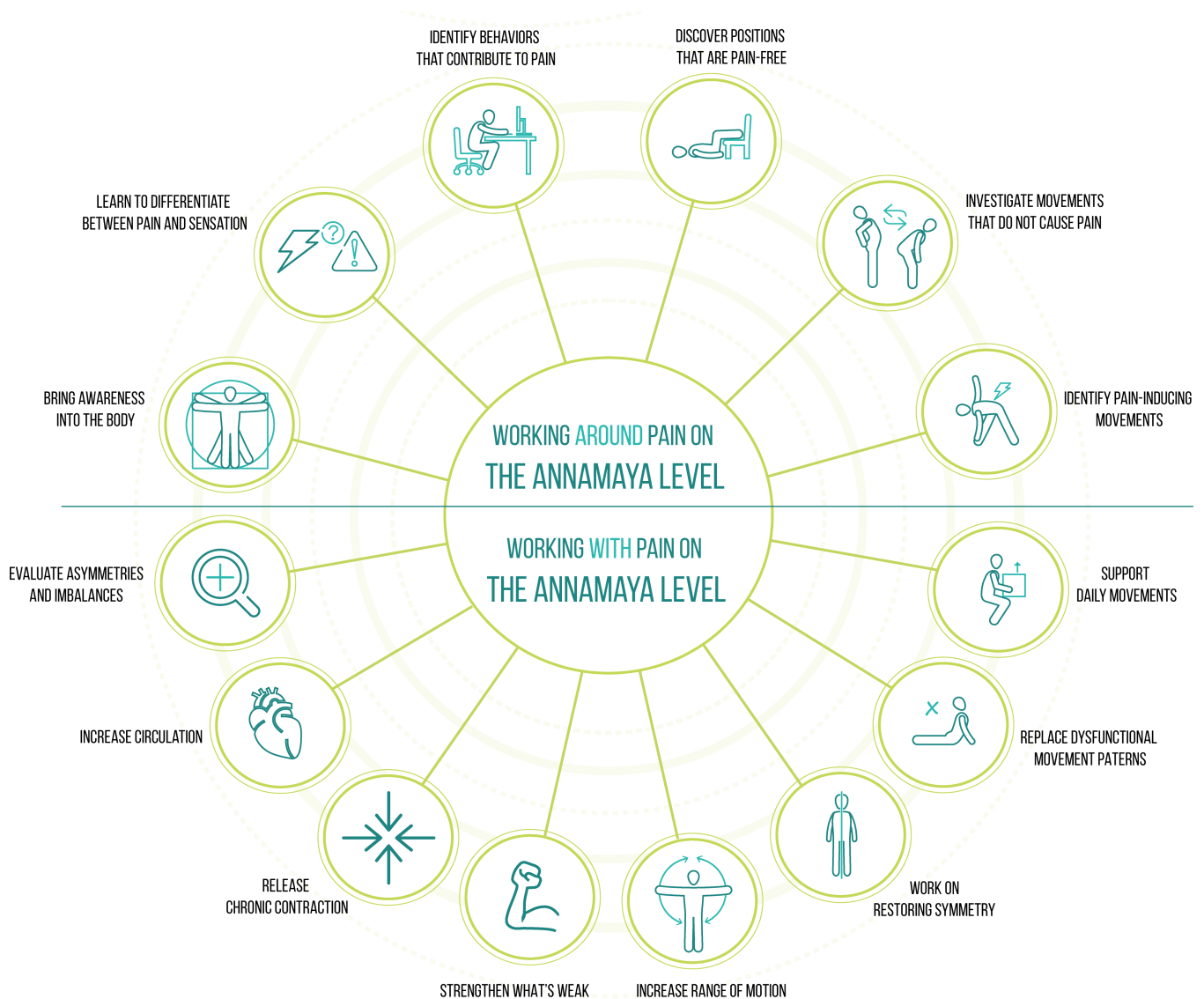


WORKING WITH CHRONIC PAIN ON THE ANNAMAYA LEVEL

Working with chronic pain on the level of physical body (Annamaya) is appropriate when the student is dealing with pain that is connected to some sort of structural issue (like back pain or hip pain, etc.). If the source of pain is physiological (like fibromyalgia, for example) the movements would be very basic and play a supportive role for breath work and mind work.

There are two distinctive ways of approaching chronic pain on the Annamaya (Physical body) level: working WITH IT and working AROUND IT. Working “around pain” is appropriate both for structural and physiological issues, while working “with pain” is more appropriate for structural problems.



Working AROUND pain includes the following:

1. **Bringing awareness into the body.** Many pain sufferers disconnect from the body or begin to hate it. We need to help the student to reestablish this connection to the body and begin to accept it even with pain.
2. **Differentiating between pain and sensation.** In chronic pain the boundaries between pain and sensation get blurred and any sensation can get interpreted as pain. We need to teach the student how to recognize sensations for what they are and not confuse them with pain.
3. **Identifying activities and behaviors in daily life that might be contributing to pain** and encouraging the student to eliminate, minimize or replace them (whatever is realistic for her lifestyle).
4. **Discovering positions that are pain-free** (in supine, kneeling, seating and standing positions). Those positions serve as a starting point for movement and show the student that she can always return back to them and rest there without pain.
5. **Investigating the parameters of movements that do not cause pain.** The gradual exploration of movement starts from the spine and extends out into the periphery (limbs). It's important to find those movements to show the student that she can move without pain. At the beginning it is best to create a practice from those movements.
6. **Identifying movements that are agitating and pain-inducing.** It is best to avoid any movement that causes pain at the beginning to give the student a safe space within her practice to move without pain. As her practice progresses it might be possible to explore some of those movements if this sort of progression is warranted and serves to strengthen and stabilize the body.

Working WITH pain includes the following:

1. **Evaluating**
 - asymmetries (right/left, front/back),
 - imbalances (agonist/antagonist),
 - movement patterns;
2. **Increasing circulation** to the general area of pain (this often means working with painful area indirectly by gently contracting the surrounding musculature);
3. **Releasing chronic contraction** (following the contract-relax-stretch principle);
4. **Strengthening what's weak;**
5. **Increasing range of motion** in the joint (gradually, over time);
6. **Working on restoring symmetry and balance** (from right to left; from front to back, between agonists and antagonists);
7. **Eliminating or replacing dysfunctional movement patterns** (on and off the mat);
8. Identifying daily life activities that are impeded by pain and using asana to **support movements** that are necessary for those life activities.