

"A mini exercise ball cured my neck pain!"

Debilitating pain kept Ruth Chiles, 64, from leading a full life—until she uncovered the simple tension-releasing remedy that restored her health and happiness

Ruth felt guilt creeping in as the phone rang. "I'm going to have to take another sick day," she regretfully told her boss. "I was calling in sick more and more often. I knew it was starting to wear on my boss's patience, but I was just in too much pain to go into the office."

Sleepless nights

"Things started to get unbearable about four years ago. I was spending three hours in my car each day driving to and from work—an hour and

a half each way—and then I would sit in front of the computer all day, which made my shoulders, neck and back stiff and sore. I would return home absolutely drained and exhausted and fall right into bed.

"As tired as I was, though, on most nights I'd be shocked awake by extreme pain in my neck and right arm that prevented me from getting back to sleep. When I was able to sleep through the night, I'd often wake up in the morning with a headache that would last throughout the day and make it difficult to focus. My sleep

debt kept growing, and I was feeling more and more irritable. I just wasn't myself anymore.

"As someone who works in the health field as a dietician, I know how important sleep is to being healthy, and the fact that I wasn't getting enough made me very anxious. As the sleepless nights turned into sleepless weeks, I became increasingly stressed.

"I've always favored natural remedies, so I didn't want to start relying on pain medicine. But after countless nights waking up with my arm just killing me, I knew I needed to do something. I tried a class that was kind of like tai chi in water, but that didn't help. I had done yoga for years, but that didn't help either. The pain became constant, the headaches were getting progressively worse and I was starting to get scared.

A feel-good fix

"A friend noticed how much pain I was in and recommended I try a class at my gym called The Miracle Ball

Method. Desperate for a solution, I decided to take the class. On my first day, I received a small, squishy ball. Elaine Petrone, the class instructor and creator of The Miracle Ball Method, taught me how to position the ball under different parts of my body. Once the ball was in position, she told me to lie there and breathe. It felt very passive—not at all like exercise and not painful.

"It actually seemed so passive that, throughout the class, I wondered how the ball could possibly have any effect. But as soon as I walked out, I felt different, in a good way. I suddenly felt much more aware of my body and how I was moving, and that helped me feel looser. I started attending Elaine's Saturday class on a regular basis, and I would occasionally try to sneak one in on a weekday too.

"Once I felt comfortable with the method, I started using the ball at home. I even brought the ball into bed sometimes. Before going to sleep,

I would put it between my shoulder blades, which helped release the tension in my shoulders.

"After a couple weeks, I was sleeping through the night. My headaches vanished, and getting a good night's sleep helped me cope better with the

"My pain and headaches vanished, and my posture improved almost instantly. It actually feels good to move again!"

pressures of work and my long commute. My posture improved too, and I started standing straighter and moving more easily. In fact, I went to get my bone density checked recently, and the nurse had to measure

my height twice. She couldn't believe it: I had grown nearly half an inch!

"I think the method has helped me age more gracefully—I can feel how all the parts of my body connect to one another and how they all move as one. I've started taking dance and tap lessons because it actually feels good to move again. Now I'm not calling in sick anymore, and I look forward to living my life to the fullest!"

—As told to Alyssa Rosenthal

HOW A LITTLE BALL DELIVERS

The average American clocks 11 hours per day sitting—and this leads to stiff, tense muscles and chronic pain. The key to breaking free from this pain trap, says Ofer Wellisch, M.D., chief of pain medicine at Stamford Hospital in Connecticut, is a mind-body approach. He explains, "Using this ball method combines mindfulness with stretching, allowing the muscles to relax and release."

Over time, using the ball also helps the muscles stay loose. "It teaches you to stop holding yourself so tight, and

when you do that, your body begins to self-adjust," explains Elaine Petrone, who created The Miracle Ball Method and worked with Dr. Wellisch to design a program for his pain patients. The bonus: Free from stiffness, you'll stand taller for an instant slimming effect.

To get started, follow Ruth's lead and try these movements three times per week. All you need is a squishy ball the size of a grapefruit. To learn more, pick up Petrone's book, *The Miracle Ball Method* (\$13, Amazon.com), which comes with two balls.

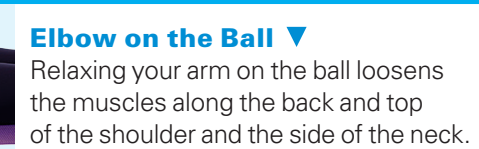
BIG RELIEF FROM PAIN & STRESS



Neck on the Ball ▲

This position releases tension from the *trapezius* and *scalenus* muscles, which support the head.

TO DO: Lie flat on your back. Lift your head up with one hand and use the other to place the ball where the base of your skull meets the top of your neck. Release the weight of your head onto the ball. Hold for 2 to 3 minutes.



Elbow on the Ball ▼

Relaxing your arm on the ball loosens the muscles along the back and top of the shoulder and the side of the neck.

TO DO: Lie flat on your back. Make a right angle with your tighter arm and place the ball under your elbow. Release the weight of your arm and shoulder onto the ball. Hold for 2 to 3 minutes. Repeat on the other side.



Ribs on the Ball ▲

This loosens the *rhomboid* muscles and the *latissimus dorsi* to release tension and eliminate pain in the upper back.

TO DO: Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor. Roll onto one side and place the ball in the center of your back, about an inch below your shoulder blades, then roll back over so you are on top of the ball. Relax your weight on the ball. Hold for 2 to 3 minutes.

Ruth Chiles, Stamford, CT