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ZAPPING PAIN

By Christina Harper

Pills, acupuncture, hypnosis, massage: Sometimes nothing seems to work. For a few people, welcome relief has come in an electronic package.

John Doremus of Everett had been putting up with lots of pain and taking medications for 10 years while suffering from diabetic neuropathy, a condition that leads to numbing pain in his hands and legs. He also has rheumatoid arthritis.

Doremus, 57, now uses a microcurrent and cranial electrotherapy stimulator, which moves electrons through the body and brain. It's called an Alpha-Stim 100.

The device can be obtained only with a doctor's prescription and is covered by some insurance companies. It is noninvasive, since patients attach two clips to the earlobes. Patients can use the device several times a day for 10 to 20 minutes a session for pain, anxiety, and depression.

"Dosage is very individual to the patient, especially with chronic pain," said Nancy Campbell, manager of Therapeutic Resources in Mill Creek.

"It's nothing new," Campbell said.

The technology is 20 years old and research on the ear clips has been going on for about 30 years.

For an hour a day, depending on his pain, Doremus hooks up the Alpha-Stim to his earlobes, turns the unit on and relaxes.

Researchers don't know exactly how the electrical pulses affect the brain, but they do know that it helps some patients. Doremus says the cumulative results have helped him.

After three to four weeks of using the device, Doremus began using the unit during the day and was down to taking one pain pill at night. Soon he tapered off the pain medication altogether.

The \$800 cost for the machine was more economical than \$90 a month for pain medication, Doremus said, though his insurance did cover the cost.

He learned through experience the best time to use the Alpha-Stim. The rhythm of the pulses may affect him during some activities.

"It's better not to use it driving," Doremus said.

Doremus knows that his ailments can be better or worse depending sometimes on the weather. But in the year that he has been using the Alpha-Stim, he has been more than pleased with the results.

"It doesn't cure the pain but dulls it out," Doremus said. "It's pain I can deal with now."