

## How does desensitization work?

A desensitization program provides a sensory stimulus to the affected area for short periods of time frequently throughout the day. A **stimulus** is a piece of textured fabric, a brush, an ice cube or another tool that provides the brain with sensory input. Gradually, the brain responds to this stimulus by getting used to the sensation (desensitizing) and decreasing pain.

## What does a desensitization program consist of?

In a desensitization program you will use a stimuli that causes the least painful response, and gradually transition to stimuli that cause the most painful response. Once the affected area begins to get used to the first stimulus, the next stimulus is introduced. For example, you may start with a very soft material stimulus (silk) and transition to a rougher material (wool) or textured fabric (Velcro). The course of this progression may take several days to several weeks, depending on the level of hypersensitivity.

## How do I perform desensitization at home?

- Complete a total of 8-10 minutes of desensitization, 4-8 times per day.
- Start with only 1-2-minute increments at a time based on your tolerance.
- Change the stimulus you use each day.

Examples of a stimulus you can use:

- Brushing: use a hairbrush or combing in circular or sweeping motions over the area
- Tapping: use your hand to tap or pat the area
- Towel rubs: use a dry towel and rub the area in circular or sweeping motions
- Massage: massage the area with your hands, may use lotion

- Vibration: apply home massager or other vibration tool over area
- Light touch: gently “tickle” the area with your fingertips

Additional desensitization ideas and tools:

- Rub lotion
- Ice cubes
- Warm wash cloths
- Warm/cold water
- Erasers
- Rice
- Velcro
- Toothbrush
- Cotton balls
- Q-tips
- Cold packs/warm packs
- Paint brush
- Silk
- Tennis ball
- Sponge
- Leather
- Cotton
- Wool
- Corduroy
- Netting
- Soap or shaving cream

**What steps do I take to perform desensitization?**

1. Choose up to 5 textures
2. Start with the texture that you consider the most tolerable. Apply it to your **unaffected** limb in the same area as the painful area of the **affected** limb.
3. Move the texture against your skin with light stroking, firm stroking, and circular motions according to what you can tolerate.
4. Keep your eyes open and look at what you are applying and where you are applying it to.
5. Say out loud what the item is that you are applying to your body and where you are applying it.
6. Concentrate on how it feels and express it out loud.
7. Now apply the same texture to your affected limb and repeat the process.
  - Keep thinking about your unaffected limb while moving toward the painful area.

- Go further toward the painful area, still thinking pleasant feelings.
  - Does it feel the same?
8. Have someone test you with your eyes closed. Can you guess what texture you are feeling?

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