

Coping with Pain (With or Without Medication)

People may have pain for many reasons. Sometimes the pain is brief and sometimes it lasts or is chronic. It can affect your physical and mental well-being. Here are some ideas to help. You can start with one or more, it's up to you.

What will help ease my pain?

- **Set goals.** Think about things you would like to do, or start doing again. You may need to start slow. You may even have setbacks and that's okay. It will feel good when you meet some or all of your goals, even though you have pain.
- **Manage your stress.** A good place to start is by getting enough sleep, eating well and doing approved exercise on a regular basis.
- **Do things you enjoy.** Sometimes doing things to take your mind off of your pain works. Spend time with people that make you feel good. Start a hobby or other activity to take your mind off of the pain.
- **Find support.** It may be helpful to talk to someone else that also lives with pain. Joining a support group might help too.
- **Try a mindfulness approach.** This means nonjudgmentally noticing pain (notice it and stop negative thoughts that may enter your mind). Also try this in other areas of life that may cause pain. This can help reduce unhelpful, negative thoughts about your pain experience.

Pain + Judgement = Suffering

- **Change your thoughts.** If your thoughts focus on your pain it can make you feel worse. Instead of telling yourself how bad your pain is, change your thoughts to something better. Think about something that makes you feel good, no matter how small it may seem. Remind yourself that you can still enjoy your life even though you have pain. Do this as often as you can so that your pain isn't your main focus.

- **Get counseling.** Talking to a professional might help you better cope/deal with your pain. They may also help you learn the relaxation techniques listed below.

- **Learn relaxation techniques.** The following is a brief introduction:
 - **Deep breathing-** When people have pain they might breathe with short breaths which can make the pain worse. Instead, try taking a deep breath by breathing in through your nose and continue to inhale as you feel your belly expand. Hold it for 3 seconds. Then let your breath out, all at once. Then think calming thoughts.

 - **Muscle relaxation (tense and relax)-** To do this you will tense different muscle groups for a few seconds, but not to the point of pain. Think about how the tension feels then let it go. Next, focus on how good the relaxation feels. For example, to relax your chin, neck, and shoulders do the following:
 - Drop your chin to your chest
 - Draw your shoulders up toward your ears
 - Feel the tension build and hold the tension for a few seconds
 - Take a deep breath
 - Exhale all the way out while relaxing your shoulders and face/jaw and focus on your relaxation

- Repeat as needed and do this with other muscle groups in your body if needed
- **Imagery-** Close your eyes, if you want, and think of a place that you find relaxing. Thinking of the smells, the view, and the sounds which can all distract you from your pain. Visit this spot whenever you need to relax or improve your pain.
- **Accept that you may not be pain free.** This may be difficult at first. Acceptance does not mean giving up or giving into the pain. It means seeing the facts of the pain as they are so that you can make improvements in life and handle your pain better. Once you do this, you can focus on other things in your life. Sometimes expecting to be pain free makes people focus on their pain too much. When you feel pain, remind yourself that tomorrow might be better. Find the thoughts that will get you through the pain and allow you to enjoy life, even though you have pain. Once you do this, you may improve the impact pain has on your life.
- **Talk to your doctor** to see if there are additional ways to treat your pain beyond the use of medications.

Where can I get more information on living with pain?

- The American Chronic Pain Association website offers tools to help you live with and improve your pain:
<https://theacpa.org/default.aspx>
- Michigan Medicine- Comprehensive Musculoskeletal Center:
<http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/cmc/pain-management>

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Author: Karen Crampton, LMSW

Reviewers: Andrea DeKam, LMSW, Pain Management Steering Committee

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