

# Body of Knowledge

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## WAYS TO REDUCE CHRONIC PAIN

When you begin to work on reducing pain, it's likely to go slower than you want. You may continue to be angry that your life is not normal, that you can't do what other people do and that everything takes so long. Respect and acknowledge every emotion and negative thought; and let yourself know these thoughts aren't the whole truth. You are more than, love is bigger than, your health is stronger and your commitment is more than these awful feelings. When your pain is higher than a 7 (on your scale) you are likely in an autonomic nervous system response of fight or flight. A yoga class isn't going to cut it, pain meds or other methods of downregulation could be needed.

### 1. Add competing sensory input.

Sensory gating, the processing and perception of sensory information, is reduced with competing sensory input. The nerves can only send so many messages at a time, the most novel, frequently changing stimulus is what the brain chooses to pay attention to. Brisk rubbing and deep pressure will compete with pain for neural pathways, which is why we squeeze a body part after we have bumped it. Vigorous exercise floods the brain with sensory input and novel stimulus can distract as well as compete for neural pathways. If you can't exercise engage in multi-sensory exploration, smell, touch, etc. focus your attention on it.

### 2. Take corrective action.

Your mind wants to know you are going to deal with this problem. That's why your brain created pain in the first place, to alert you to something gone wrong. What will tell your brain that the problem will be handled? First acknowledge the pain so there is no reason for it to increase, assuring that you noticed something needs to change. Pain breeds pain don't ignore it. You can try a placebo, or information from pain science or rest. Focus on breath, do slow movement, or change the technique of what you are doing. Remind yourself that you are not injured or doing more damage, you're experiencing a habitual pain response that you are changing. Your corrective action will be specific to you and what you are doing. You are giving yourself a little more control. Pain breeds pain, *don't just ignore it.*

### 3. Increase the body maps

Movement and touch that is mindful, novel, curious, exploratory, active and purposeful will help build more detailed complex maps of the body in your brain. Especially movement that is slow and small that you pay close attention to. The greater the detail of our body maps the more nuanced our brain can process information from our bodies. Pain dulls body maps and in turn decreases the ability to feel anything other than pain in the corresponding body part. When you don't have pain in a usually chronic place, fulling notice what it is like without pain, move it gently, feel the ease.

### 4. Down regulate

Pain affects the autonomic nervous system, so try to ingenerate a parasympathic response (rest and digest). Breath is a primary way the autonomic nervous system is controlled, have a bunch of breathing practices written on index cards that you can easily follow, or use recorded breath and relaxation exercises. Meditation is another way to calm an over active nervous system. It is easy to find recorded meditations online. Both of these techniques may be too challenging when your pain is high. Try deep slow pressure on body parts that are not in pain.

# Body of Knowledge

## REDUCE CHRONIC PAIN page 2

What makes you slow down? A cup of your favorite tea, while you carefully attend to the sensation of it down your throat and into your torso. A hot bath. Experiment with what is soothing and makes you feel safe.

### 5. Global interventions

Good sleep, good food, exercise (appropriate to your condition), and meditation/mindfulness affect all body systems positively and so has a positive impact on pain. Pacing, rest when you need to stop, do when you feel better. That is hard but a necessary skill to keep you from overdoing, which slows healing.

Some tools you have when pain *begins* to escalate:

Breath    Imagination    Tapping    Guided recordings    Distractions

When a technique isn't making a difference try something else, or try it at a later time. You are developing a relationship with an approach, you want to have faith that it will help and confidence that you are doing it right. Here are some other approaches to experiment with.

Attention:

- What is the most painful place?
- How can you describe it in detail, use lots of adjectives, images, sensory words?
- Put your focus 100% on a breath practice do it for 3 minutes.
- Now check back in with the painful area. Has it changed? An increase or decrease in pain or unchanged? How do you describe this area now?
- Repeat as many times as feels right. If you have time spend it processing by drawing, doodling, journaling or other work with your hands.

Imagination:

- Look at your arm, really see it take it in.
- Close your eyes and feel your arm, just focus on one. How alive does it feel?
- With eyes closed (opened if that is more comfortable, but stay movement focused.) Move your arm as if you are moving fluid, very thick water. Take your time, luxuriate.
- Sense your arm again with your eyes closed. How is it different than your other arm? How alive or aware does it feel now? Has your pain or body state changed?

Vibrations:

- Hum in a deep low tone. Can you feel the vibration in your skull? Take your time, explore different tones, relax your jaw. When you feel it in your skull try to experience the vibrations other places in your body. Lay your hands where you are trying to feel the vibration.

# Body of Knowledge

REDUCE CHRONIC PAIN page 3

Pressure point tapping:

- Karate chop little finger edge of hands while saying “*Even though I am feeling this pain.....I fully and completely accept myself. I know these sensations are caused by a faulty perception of danger and I am not causing injury to myself.*” Change the wording so it makes sense to you. Or alternately tap the depression below and on each side of your collarbone. Notice sensations, emotions, thoughts, you can change the statement as you see fit. Rhythmic tapping alternating sides of the body alerts the two hemispheres of the brain to pay attention.

You can use physical pain as a guide to introspection “what am I feeling/emotionally?” Is this an inability to tolerate certain emotional experiences? We perceive physical symptoms instead of certain emotions because the unconscious mind/body considers that to be less painful, less dangerous or harmful than emotions. Notice and acknowledge, you probably don’t want the feelings but they won’t destroy you.

Meditation Apps can be downloaded on a phone or computer. You have to find ones that work for you, many have different pacing or focus and different voice qualities. Tara Brach has some on reducing pain.

HeartMath makes a handheld biofeedback device called EmWave. It is affordable and simple to use. You follow simple games to increase your Heart rate variability, which resets your autonomic nervous system.

***Doing less is not being less. Rest gives you more.***

***Connect to nature notice its complexity and knowledge of how to be. You are nature too, feel yourself belonging.***

***What daily choices can you make to reinforce a new emergent worldview?***

***You are enough. You are doing what you can. It’s likely the pressures of our culture are trying to press you into a mold that doesn’t work for you.***