

Chronic pain

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Chronic pain

- **Chronic pain as distinct from acute pain generally lasts longer than a few (about three) months. Chronic pain is either always or very frequently present and it is associated with a myriad of contributing factors and consequences and it is usually only minimally responsive to drug treatments. The experience and understanding of chronic pain incorporates biological, cultural, emotional, behavioural, relational, cognitive and spiritual meanings**

Individual response to chronic condition and chronic pain (1)

- **Each of us will react differently to the experience of a chronic condition and pain. This reaction will in part depend on the extent of the personal threat to our fundamental ways of making meaning of our world, our future and ourselves**
 - **to sense of self and identity**
 - **to sense of personal worth and value**
 - **to sense of power to influence the outcome of events**
 - **to sense of reality**
 - **to core roles e.g. spouse, parent, worker, friend, daughter/son, recreational pursuits**

Individual response to chronic condition and chronic pain (2)

- **Our vulnerability and our capacity to manage effectively with a chronic condition and pain depends on:**
 - **our personal history of coping successfully with challenging life circumstances**
 - **our trauma history,**
 - **current severity of acute psychological distress**
 - **depression and general psychological well being**
 - **current pain severity**
 - **core beliefs about the pain and disability**
 - **confidence to manage the condition & pain**
 - **pain coping strategies and pain behaviour**
 - **health status**
 - **activity levels (functional and recreational)**
 - **spouse and family behaviour**
 - **sense of personal control over life**
 - **substance usage (prescribed and non-prescribed)**
 - **professionals involved and their role**
 - **grief and loss issues**
 - **workplace relationships and history**

Psychological Self-help in Chronic Illness and Pain

Need to conduct regular independent audits of all aspects of well-being (bodily reactions, thinking, feelings, behaviour, interpersonal) and adopt an active bystander stance (rather than circling around the positions of victim, passive bystander and perpetrator) in relationship with self.

Bodily reactions

- **Proactively and reactively lower baseline level of physiological arousal. This can positively impact on subjective experience of pain, sleep disturbance, irritability and fatigue.**
- **Learn to connect bodily sensations to feelings, thinking and behaviour e.g. emotional awareness track down, progressive muscular relaxation, visualisation, meditation, self-hypnosis, gentle physical reconditioning and exercise, safe physical release of anger, regular therapeutic massage, laughter and satisfying sex, nutritious food**
- **drastically cut down or eliminate artificial stimulants such as caffeine and CNS depressants such as alcohol that can aggravate sleeping difficulties and can cause profound problems of its own**

Thinking

- **Important to remember that we are people first and sufferers of chronic condition and pain second.**
- **Distinction between the sensation and mental construction of pain**
- **Find your own inherent value and meaning in a life that is respectful and responsive to your condition and pain but not dominated by it. This may mean moving away from narrow paternalistic, materialistic and hierarchical definitions of success to incorporate notions of compassionate responsiveness to personal wellbeing.**
- **Operate within your circle of influence rather than your circle of concern (Covey 1990).**
- **Enter the moment (whether work or play) and learn to being fully in the present**
- **Identify and implement effective interventions in self-critical and discouraging ways of speaking to self (blaming, using “shoulds”, black and white thinking , catastrophising, control fallacies, confusing feelings with facts, filtering positives into negatives, entitlement fallacy, unrealistic expectations) and internally becoming your own most encouraging, safe and supportive friend**
- **Understand the differences between pain management and pain treatment. Develop more positive constructions of core processes that incorporate the chronic illness and pain. Practise your new thinking skills in graded work and recreational activities.**
- **Reconceptualise who owns responsibility for your quality of life and be grateful for the positives whilst acknowledging the considerable challenges**

Feelings

- **Modulate and check emotional barometer as if you were caring for a beloved child or friend.**
- **Learn to identify and constructively express a full range of feelings including those associated with multiple losses and stressors i.e. sadness, fear, anger, guilt and love e.g. Journal writing, drawing, music and dance**
- **Constructive of even very painful feelings will allow the development of more complex meaning structures that are capable of incorporating and responding to the realities of a chronic condition and pain**

Behavioural

- **Stop behaving like a superhero. Use proactive and integrated sensitivity and responsiveness to own physical, emotional, interpersonal, behavioural and spiritual needs.**
- **Implement own professional and personal development program**
- **Recognise the need for more self-care at times of personal vulnerability of increased strain**
- **Stop or organise proper help for all self-destructive behaviours, immediately**
- **Consciously discriminate in your use of personal energy. Life is a marathon not a sprint. Pace yourself.**
- **Capture specified and separate time for self-care, creative and fun behaviours. Have some real time (sex, rivers, beach, mountains, life)**
- **Please do not re-enact patterns of personal, emotional, social and physical self-neglect (possibly unconsciously informed for many of us by unmet emotional needs in childhood, before the age of psychological parenting eg lack of close emotional tracking, experience of worth being conditional on external achievement or service to other people. Please do not emotionally disconnect from yourself or your feelings. Your uncomfortable feelings and bodily reactions are trying to tell you something very important.**

Interpersonal

- **Selective personal self-disclosure. Support network information on the validation of health behaviour and the invalidation of pain behaviour and the importance of constructive knowledge, practical assistance and quality emotional support for the tough times**
- **Recognise and set limits. Stop being innocent about the assertive need for self-care. Challenge unrealistic and sometimes manipulative expectations of some people including yourself (especially). Enact appropriate boundaries, conflict resolution skills, listening and assertion skills**
- **Please make a real commitment to yourself do at least three things to enhance your self-care before you leave today. Tell your immediate neighbour and later on, someone who loves you about it (take a few minutes).**

Resources

- **Caudill, M. A. (1995). Managing pain before it manages you. New York: Guilford Press. (Can be ordered through specialist booksellers including Rodney at "Open Leaves" in Melbourne Ph 03 93472355 or Dymocks)**
- **Lawrinson, J. (1998), Conversations with pain and illness: A new handbook for living with chronic conditions. Charnwood, ACT: Ginninderra Press (available from Stephen Matthews Ginninderra Press 0418 404 519)**
- **Understanding Depression. Evans, B. J., Burrows G. D. & Norman, T. R. Mental Health Promotion Unit. University of Melbourne. Austin & Repatriation Medical Centre. Email: bevans@alphalink.com.au Phone: 03 949 645 37.**
- **Your Guide to Understanding and Managing Stress (Revised Edition). Evans, B. J., Coman, G. J. & Burrows G. D. Mental Health Foundation of Victoria. The Options Project. Email: bevans@alphalink.com.au Phone: 03 949 645 37.**
- **Pennebaker, James W. (1997). Opening up the healing power of expressing emotions: New York: Guilford Press.**
- **Katherine, Anne (1993). Boundaries: Where you end and I begin . New York : Fireside (Feminist bookshop 02 98102666 or Dymocks)**