

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING PAIN

Remember:

***THE PAIN YOU FEEL IS NOT MERELY A FUNCTION ON
PHYSICAL CHANGES***

This means that:

YOU CAN CONTROL THE AMOUNT OF PAIN YOU EXPERIENCE

Controlling Emotional Reactions to Pain:

Stop the vicious circle of pain and anxiety by:

- 1. STOPPING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS**
- 2. RELAXATION**

Do some self-monitoring and look out for situations which stress you. As soon as you detect the first signs of either stress or a build up of pain you need to consciously react by breathing slowly and deeply and letting go of the tension in your muscles.

Train yourself to do this:

1. Comfortable, quiet location.
2. Count “1” on breath in and think “relax” on breath out. Count “2” on breath in and “relax on breath out, etc.”
3. Focus attention on breathing and counting.
4. Normal rate and depth of breathing, using smooth inhalations and exhalations.
5. Expand diaphragm on breath in and keep chest still.
6. Count up to 10 and back to 1.
7. Practice twice daily, 10 minutes each time, for 7 days.

Then you need to practise it for use in your daily life. You can do this by getting yourself relaxed and then imagining the last occasion upon which you had an argument or if you can't recall that then the last time you have a really severe pain episode. Become aware of any physical changes you note in your body as your mind moves from peaceful images to the anxiety provoking image. When you have noticed the change try and hold the anxiety provoking image while breathing evenly and steadily and relaxing again.

Programme into your day regular times to do a relaxation in order to dampen emotional build-up. Take time off from your frustrations. Take regular breaks to do your breathing.

Two minutes regularly throughout the day will be a help in preventing the build up of stress.

Remember that:

THE EARLIER YOU USE YOUR RELAXATION TECHNIQUES TO COUNTERACT STRESS OR PAIN THE STRONGER THE EFFECT

3. ATTENTION FOCUS STRATEGIES:

Imagery:

Work up your own images – again this is something that you will need to work at and practise. Include all your senses in your image sight, smell, taste, hearing – get inside your body and actually feel yourself doing the things you imagine. See things from inside your own body not as if you're watching yourself in a movie or video. If your attention wanders bring it back to the image. Get used to controlling your attention and remember:

YOU CAN FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION FULLY ON ONLY ONE THING AT A TIME AND YOU CAN CHOOSE WHAT YOU WILL FOCUS ON

Change the context of your pain:

The important thing is that you are so involved in the image that you have little attention left to pay to the discomfort. If you find the scene you are using ineffective or if it becomes less vivid after a while switch to another one. Include eating, dancing, arguing, sex, running, skydiving anything that will occupy your attention – fantasies, memories anything, throw in unexpected things. Sometimes you may find that you can maintain one very detailed or involving image for a long time and at other times you may jump around from one image to another and back again constantly. Plan ahead so you have choices available but don't feel locked into your plans. Remember to use as many senses as possible. Practise during a period of minimal or no pain and it is a good idea to precede your practise with relaxation techniques such as a couple of minutes of breathing.

Diversion:

Another strategy for diverting your attention is to attend carefully to tasks around you. You can do things like counting floor or ceiling tiles or watch TV while keeping track of some aspect of the program. Or you can engage in mental activities such as remembering the words to a song, mental arithmetic such as counting backwards from a hundred by seven, planning the weekend, or whatever.

Further strategies are limiting pain and relocating pain. Carefully define the area in which you are feeling pain and do not allow it to move beyond that area. Relocate pain by concentrating your attention on a spot in which no pain is felt.

4. THOUGHTS

Try not to allow yourselves to think negatively at any time but particularly when pain is starting to build up. Negative thoughts can be a signal that it is time to change and to start using your strategies. Once pain begins to build up it is very important that you control negative thoughts and take charge of your experience.

Think in terms of stages:

1. **Preparation:** In this stage you are preparing for the onset of pain.
2. **Confrontation:** This is where you confront and handle the sensations.
3. **Handling critical moments:** This is where feelings and sensations intensify.
4. **Reflection:** Thinking about how you handled the situation.

In the preparation stage:

It is important to deliberately “say to yourself” helpful things. You need to reject a helpless attitude. Work at coping. Develop a plan. You have to say to yourself “I can deal with this” and actively prepare by thinking about a plan. Stop negative thoughts and redirect your attention to positive ideas. Some things you might say to yourself might be:

Stop worrying – Worrying won’t help anything.
What are some of the things I can do instead?

I’m feeling anxious – that’s natural. But that’s no reason to give up. Let me just breathe deeply and relax.

Discouragement and anxiety might occur but if you are alert you can counteract them. Catch yourself thinking negative thoughts and STOP them. I can’t emphasise this enough. Maintain a positive attitude.

In the confrontation stage:

As the pain begins to mount, you will need to employ the coping strategies you know. So maintain your positive thinking throughout by saying things to yourself such as:

All right, I’m feeling tense. That lets me know that I should take some slow, deep breaths as I relax more and switch from the strategy I was using to another one.

I’m hurting. Instead of letting the pain push me around, I’m going to try to reduce its effects.

I won’t get over-whelmed. I’ll just take one step at a time.

It doesn’t help to lie here and hurt. Perhaps if I use this pain as a chance to control my reactions, I won’t hurt as bad.

STOP these negative thoughts. Let me just concentrate on one of the strategies to do something positive.

In the Critical Moments Stage:

You are at your most vulnerable. Be conscious of this and keep up your attempt to keep the pain manageable. Remember you are not attempting to eliminate the pain totally just to keep it manageable. Your thoughts at this time may go like this:

Things are going pretty bad. I can't take it anymore – no, wait – just pause. I shouldn't make things worse. I'll review my planned strategies to see what I can switch to.

My pain is terrible. Things are falling apart. STOP! Stop that. Relax. I will focus my attention on something else.

I can't get my mind off this pain. The image won't work. I'm going to have to stop. NO! Wait a minute! I planned for this. Stop the negative thoughts.

In the last reflection stage:

This stage involves praising yourself for your efforts and thinking how you might improve your management of pain next time it occurs.