



MANAGING PAIN

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We've all felt varying degrees and types of pain in our lives. From broken bones, sprains, headaches to childbirth, pain comes in many forms and has many origins. Probably the only two things all types of pain have in common is that they're unpleasant for the average person, and they're associated with damage to the body from either the outside or the inside. There are advantages to pain in that it can be your incentive to remove yourself from a dangerous or damaging situation. But generally pain isn't something most people invite into their lives or want in their lives. There are two main types of pain: acute and chronic. Let me first explain what each type of pain means and who might experience it.

Acute

Acute pain is a signal. It tells you that something is wrong right now and you'd better attend to it, or else! It usually motivates you to seek out some kind of medical help. In that sense, acute pain, as uncomfortable or even excruciating as it may be, is actually beneficial. Furthermore, acute pain has a clear, identifiable cause. That cause, once identified, can be treated, thereby lessening the pain at the root (rather than just muting the pain with pain medication, although in some cases that is all that can be done). Some examples of acute pain are caused by: acute appendicitis, bone fractures, muscle sprains and heart attacks. Acute pain is generally defined as lasting up to 30 days.

Chronic

Chronic pain starts as an acute pain and then continues beyond the normal time expected for resolution of the problem. It is also often defined as pain that lasts more than six months. Unlike acute pain, which alerts you to the fact that something is wrong or damaged and needs to be attended to, chronic pain isn't therapeutically beneficial. Where the focus is on identifying and treating the cause of acute pain, the focus is on reducing and managing chronic pain so that permanent damage or disability doesn't result, and functioning is as good as it can be considering whatever is wrong or damaged.

When I say "whatever is wrong or damaged," I'm referring to tissue damage, nerve damage, disruptions in blood supply that cause tightness and oppression, phantom limb pain, as well as pain from treatments for any of these. Pain management is by no means a one-size-fits-all challenge. Everyone experiences pain differently and some people suffer far more pain than others. The reason? Well, it's more like reasons. Heredity, fear, the level of stress you're experiencing, your emotional state, whether you are currently experiencing or have the propensity toward clinical depression, and then there are your past experiences of pain that you carry around. There are also your individual amounts of neurotransmitters, which essentially act as pain-killers or pain producers. Another part of the challenge of pain is that it doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's part of a cycle:

- ▶ • pain
- ▶ • anxiety about the pain
- ▶ • fatigue from the anxiety as well as fatigue from the pain
- ▶ • depression due to the pain, the anxiety, and the fatigue

People in constant pain often—and understandably—feel helpless and irritable. Their cognitive abilities become impaired, their decision-making is affected, they have trouble sleeping, and their social lives often suffer. Pain can be so debilitating to so many aspects of your life because it lives in the brain and the brain is the command center for every aspect of your life. And brain imagery has showed us that there isn't just one part of your brain that's involved with pain—there are several.

Pain is affected by your emotions and affects your emotions. It is influenced by expectations and it influences them. Your thoughts and emotions can become driven by pain. But the good news is that they can also drive pain—away. And though there are competing theories on exactly how pain is produced, everyone agrees that it originates in the brain, and we can retrain your brain through hypnosis.

Hypnosis and Pain Management

Hypnosis has been found to reduce the intensity of pain (Dahlgren et al., 1995). It has also been shown to be more effective than medication (prochlorperazine/Stemetil) in treating migraines (Anderson, Basker, & Dalton, 1975), and superior to standard treatment in pain control of bone marrow transplantation patients (Syriala, Cummings, & Donaldson, 1992). It has been used successfully to manage the pain resulting from severe burns (Patterson, Goldberg, & Ehde, 1996); it has a reliable and significant impact on both acute pain related to procedures, and chronic pain (Patterson & Jensen, 2003); and it has been successfully treating pain in cancer patients of all kinds and at all stages, for years (Spira & Spiegel, 1992).

As I explained earlier in this book, the attitude you adopt is very important for pain relief in general, but particularly so for patients experiencing chronic pain. Usually, by the time someone comes to see me, they've been through attempts of many different kinds of modalities to manage their pain and all have failed. Many have a very negative attitude because of these prior failures. However, pain management is one of the most studied uses for hypnosis, and the evidence that exists, in my experience, easily changes the attitude of skeptics. I'm happy to refer patients to some of the studies I referenced so they can read for themselves how successful hypnosis has been when it comes to pain management. In fact, reading the research primes them for success during our sessions.





Pain Management on the Conscious Level

There are a number of things you can do on the conscious level to alleviate feelings of pain, and you can use them in conjunction with hypnosis for your subconscious. Some of them are:

- ▶ **Visualize someone you love.** Viewing pictures of a romantic partner has been shown to reduce pain (Younger et al., 2010).
- ▶ **Distract yourself.** You can distract yourself from pain for hours. Yes, hours is temporary, but for some people it's the difference between being able to function and being incapacitated by the pain. Go to a movie, get involved in a project around the house, do a puzzle, do anything that keeps your mind occupied, as your mind is what keeps telling you you're in pain.
- ▶ **Exercise.** The natural endorphins your brain releases that improve your mood and are responsible for the famous "runner's high," block pain signals and have myriad other benefits. Whatever level of exercise you are capable of will help. Exercise also has the added benefit of strengthening muscles, which makes certain injuries less likely.
- ▶ **Get a massage.** Massages can help reduce stress. (Stress increases pain.)
- ▶ **Cut out nicotine and alcohol.** Smoking can exacerbate existing problems with circulation, and of course it increases the risk of cancer and heart disease. As for alcohol, as I mentioned in Optimal Sleep, it interrupts sleep. And when sleep is interrupted, exhaustion results, as does stress, which, as I frequently repeat, increases pain. The domino effect of alcohol consumption can't be overstated.

Breathe Through the Pain

There are many techniques you can use on the conscious level that involve the breath. One is to inhale deeply and send that healing breath to the place of pain and visualize it cleaning out that place or maybe shattering an image of the pain. And then exhale all of the pieces. Combining the breath with visualization is a powerful tool for pain reduction. What color is your pain? What does it look like? Is it a monster, is it a pulsing spot, is it the anatomical image of the spot injured? What does a nice clean breath look like when you inhale it and what does it look like as it travels through you to the place of pain? And what happens when your breath conquers the pain? What does the clearing out process look like on the exhale? Use all of these images and clean out, pulverize, or otherwise destroy your pain with your powerful, healing breath.

- ▶ **Speak positively about your condition.** If you go around talking about how exhausted you are and how much pain you're in and how the pain seems to never stop, guess what? You are hypnotizing yourself. Remember that the words you constantly repeat to yourself and others contribute to the creation of your life, and that includes the amount of pain in your life.
- ▶ **Meditate.** There are many ways to meditate and distract your mind from the pain. One is to count in-and-out breaths up to 10 (slow, deep breaths), while sitting still in a quiet place. You'll be amazed at how you have to concentrate on the numbers. There are only 10, yet the practice of breathing correctly and thinking only about the breath and the number is remarkably not easy. This occupies your mind and of course has the benefit of bringing large amounts of healing oxygen to your brain. Don't be surprised if you get light-headed.
- ▶ **Laugh.** What's your favorite film that's a comedy? Go online and spend \$2 to watch it if you don't have it at home. This distracts you from the pain and has the added benefit of healing laughter. Laughter relaxes the body, boosts the immune system, releases endorphins (improves mood) and protects the heart as it increases blood flow, which helps guard against all manner of cardiovascular problems. Laughter has even been found to increase pain thresholds (Dunbar et al., 2011).
- ▶ **Write a pain management plan.** This isn't the plan your doctors put together for you that includes your medication, massages, biofeedback, and whatever else might alleviate your pain. This is about the specific circumstances, or times of day, or environments where your pain peaks. Know what those conditions are, and Plan A is always to avoid them, if possible. But if it's not possible, begin your deep breathing beforehand, visualize the person you love, relax your mind and body, create an affirmation around the situation, and approach your trigger conditions primed for relaxation and impervious to peak pain.

Managing Pain Instructions

1. Listen to the audiobook at least once a day for three weeks.
2. Utilize the affirmations in the next chapter by actually saying the words out loud and with feeling.
3. Use the paragraphs below to learn how to put your mind into the calm and relaxed brainwave state of Alpha by memorizing and repeating the phrases below.

And remember: it's important to trust yourself and your body's innate ability to heal itself. To understand your body's natural set point is vibrant health and it is always striving to exist in this state. Your thoughts and emotions influence your body and it listens and responds accordingly. Be kind to yourself and your body. Be patient with the process by giving your body the time and the inner space of calmness to heal itself.

Now, choose a healing word to assist your body into the powerful healing brainwave state called Alpha. With repetition, this word will be your cue to allow your body to respond appropriately to the situation while you remain fully relaxed, calm and comfortable.

"From this moment on, each and every time I desire to attain the deep state of total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed, as I am now drifting into the Alpha state of consciousness. The moment I think my chosen word, (insert your word), Alpha occurs. This word has an effect only when I use it and only under the proper circumstances. Each and every time I do use it I am fully prepared to receive positive, beneficial, and constructive suggestions, impressing each one deeper into the storage and memory facility of my brain."

"From this moment on, (insert your word), triggers deep relaxation of my mind and body. I feel Alpha occur. I feel wonderful. I feel comfortable. I am totally receptive and responsive to my own creative ideas and suggestions. I am bathed in a glow of quietness, peace, and serenity. My chosen word works only when I deliberately use it for deep relaxation to attain Alpha consciousness. Its use in regular conversation has no effect on me whatsoever. From this moment on, each and every time I desire the deep state of total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed upon saying, (insert your word) . Because my subconscious must follow my command, each and every time I desire total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed when I think my chosen word, (insert your word). I feel a deep sense of gratification as this word programming becomes a reality. I feel wonderful, generous, alive, and eager to manage my pain."



My Training in Pain Management

The hypnosis technique I'm trained in was developed by Ron Eslinger, who has been called the "Captain of Pain" (management). The Captain part comes from his service as a Captain in the US Navy, where he was a certified nurse anesthetist (CRNA). He is known best for using hypnosis to manage pain and he developed a series of suggestions designed to relax the mind and body, relieve them of pain, and stop the pain cycle. I've incorporated his best practices into the following script, which I encourage you to use at least once a day. There are also more sophisticated hypnosis techniques for dealing with pain, and hypnotists who have been trained in pain management are likely to know how to do them. My favorite one is called Glove Anesthesia, and it involves numbing your hand through hypnosis and then moving that numb hand to wherever you are feeling pain. The sensation is like the delivery of instant anesthesia to the site of the pain. If you are experiencing pain and you are interested in finding a hypnotist you can go to locally, make sure to ask what kinds of techniques they use and if they're trained in pain management.