

# *Pain Control Techniques*

## *What Can You Do?*

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Are you in pain? Has it lasted longer than it should (or than you'd like)? If so, you're not alone. It is estimated that more than one-fifth of the population of the United States experiences it. Most people find chronic pain the most difficult, wearing, demoralizing, upsetting, interfering and challenging problem that they've ever had.

Pain is universal. But it is also personal – each person's experience of pain is unique. So it's up to you to determine the best ways of dealing with it. This means that control is in your hands – not in those of medical experts – because no one knows you better than you know yourself.

Here are some strategies you can use to control your pain. Good luck!

- Have a complete and extensive physical evaluation. Before beginning any pain control program it's important that you have a complete medical examination. You want to see if any current, treatable reasons for your pain can be pinpointed, and learn to what degree your chronic pain may be due to an organic cause. Remember that the strategies you're going to read are designed for use in conjunction with (and not as a substitute for) proper and appropriate medical treatment.
- Set realistic goals. Every effective program starts with the formulation of clear, realistic, achievable goals. What, exactly, are you trying to accomplish? Your goals should be both long-term and immediate. Some you can accomplish right away, thus increasing your confidence and control. An example? Set up a pain control notebook. Many of the strategies you'll read about can work best if you do some writing. You may want to write down the answers to questions, goals, self-remedies, progress, ideas, etc. It's a good idea to keep all of this in one place – your pain control notebook.
- Describe your pain accurately and in detail. The more specifically you can describe your pain, the better equipped you (and other individuals) will be to help you deal with it. Pain descriptions should include such factors as: Where is it (is it consistently in one place or does it move, spread or radiate)? When does it occur? Under what circumstances? How long does it last? Is it constant or cyclic? What adjectives can you use to describe it? What makes it feel better or worse? (For example – does moving make it feel better? Does sitting make it feel better? Does doing something else such as sleeping or applying cold or heat change the way it feels?) How does it interact with activities such as sleeping or walking? How does it interact with symptoms you may be experiencing? How does it interact with your emotions? What kinds of treatment have you had for it? What has worked and what has not? Keep track of all this information in your notebook. This will help you in your consultations with health professionals, as well as monitoring changes as a result of your strategies!

- Rate your pain. Pain is a subjective experience. Each person experiences it differently. So it can be helpful to numerically evaluate the pain that you're experiencing. You'll be able to identify the degree to which you are experiencing pain and, more importantly, how this experience of pain is improving as a result of your efforts. Use a numerical scale (such as 0, for no pain, to 100, the most excruciating pain). Keep track of your pain rating at different times, under different circumstances, and in conjunction with different activities or strategies, each day.
- Note those things that help to reduce your pain. Keep a special list just for the things that work. You're going to experiment with different techniques to find out what's effective. When you do, write them down. After all, you want to remember what works and what doesn't. Not only should you keep this list in your notebook, also write the best techniques on a card to keep with you all the time. This way, you can remind yourself of what you can do when you experience pain.
- Practice, practice, practice! As with any techniques, the more you use them, the more they will become a part of you. The more they help you, the more they will motivate you to do even more to help yourself. Work on your techniques every day. Get into the habit of using chronic pain control strategies all the time.
- Be realistic in your expectations. There's nothing wrong with setting good, strong goals for your efforts to improve yourself. But be sure these goals are realistic. Whenever you're not sure if your goals are realistic, set up an evaluation period after which you'll re-evaluate them to determine whether or not you are headed in the right direction.
- Learn how to cope with setbacks. No matter what you try and how well you use your strategies, there is no such thing as a smooth path to recovery. Setbacks occur in anyone's self-improvement program. There may be times when you feel like you're back to square one. This is not the case! Every bit of progress you make is part of the process, as well as every setback. Learn what you can do to improve and bounce back from them.

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