

Pain Self-Management Strategies

When your pain increases, what can you do?

Try these suggestions from other people with pain...

Breathe calmly

Change your position

Change your posture

Listen to or play music, or sing

Light a candle and watch the flame

Use smells that make you happy – maybe flowers

Release tension from your muscles

Think positive thoughts

Move Rest Keep busy on a task

Create a positive emotion

Visualization

Monitor the pain like you are witnessing it without so much emotion

Brush your daughter, wife, or grand daughter's hair

Meditate

Do exercises, Tai Chi, Yoga, Pilates,...

Do an activity that connects you to the important people, things and values in your life. Maybe watch a hockey game with friends again.

Laugh or smile

There are two views on using these strategies...

1. Discover how you can decrease your pain or suffering, even a small amount, AND, then use your new 'control' of pain to improve your function and/or quality of life.
2. Discover how you can do more, even a little more, despite the pain. Don't wait for the elusive decrease in pain. Live more life now. When the pain worsens, purposefully choose to do something despite the pain, rather than have the pain control you completely.

With both views, the more you practice, the more you gain.

These two views may seem completely opposite, or even contradictory. Is it okay to use both movement and rest as pain management strategies? Of course it is.

For many people with persisting pain, self-management requires the ability to be open to, and to test out opposing views or strategies. Some people claim this sounds like that old 'need for moderation in life' belief. However it is more complex than that. In some situations the best strategy for you may be to be more active despite the pain, and in others it may be to work at decreasing your pain. At other times you may need to find a balance between the two.

As an example, one of my patients clearly found that while he exercised it was important to monitor his pain, but not too much. Ignoring it led to flare ups, and paying too much attention to it made his body "freeze up with tension" whenever he tried something new. At work, things were different. When he needed to focus on business financials, he found that the most effective strategy to get the work completed was to ignore the pain. On the other hand, he found that when he was angry about something at work or at home, the most effective strategy for him was to be vigilant of the pain. Through this vigilance he realized that part of his anger was a response to increased pain. With that awareness he controlled the anger and stopped the vicious spiral of painangermore painmore anger.

Some strategies will work best in some situations and not so well in others.

What strategies work for you? Don't limit yourself to the above list. •

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Many people with persistent pain report benefits from keeping track of what strategies work best in what situations, AND from adding their own strategies to lists such as this.