



life is now

Understanding Pain For People in Pain

What is pain?

This seems like such a simple question. If you are reading this, you probably have considerable experience with pain. So you know what pain is.

Regardless, please read on for information on pain and persistent pain. It might help you live well again with less pain and better function.

All pain is real.

Pain is changeable – by you.

Pain is a protection mechanism we all need.

- *When pain persists, even longer than 3-4 weeks, the nervous system becomes more sensitive. It starts to act as if gentle movements, muscle contractions and pressure on our body are somehow dangerous to us. As time passes, it starts to take less movement to increase the pain.*

You can retrain the sensitivity of your nervous system.

- *When pain persists, more and more things in our lives change. Pain affects everything. It changes our mood, the way we sleep, our interest in food, and all our relationships (friends, family, sexual, social and work).*

You can learn ways to gain more control over your mood, your sleep and how you are in our relationships.

- *When pain persists, more and more things start to affect the pain. Just as pain changes everything, everything changes pain.*

You can learn what triggers our pain, and how to respond to those triggers – whether the triggers are specific movements, postures, or life stresses. In time you can change our nervous system so that it becomes less and less sensitive to the things that trigger it.

- *When pain persists*, your sensory systems monitor all input from your body and from your environment more closely. If there is even the slightest hint of threat, you can feel pain.
As one of my colleagues put it, “it is as if my pain and stress were set on speed dial!”

You can change how threatened our systems become from what they feel.

- *When pain persists*, the nervous system can be so wound up and overly sensitive that it produces constant 24 hours/day pain, even when you are not moving or stressing our body.

You can learn how to wind-down (calm) your nervous system.

- *When pain persists*, the automatic processes in your body changes – heart rate, breathing, muscle tension, responses to stress, balance, hormones, immune system,... Pain affects every system in the body.
You have the power to influence most of these systems!

When you learn to change the automatic processes of your body back towards the way they were before you had pain, this will lead to less pain, better function and improved quality of life.

- *When pain persists*, you often believe that the pain from our body is due to disease, injury, or poor health of our body. So, you respond in ways intended to take better care of your body. When this doesn't work, you do what it takes to experience less pain.

When the pain is persisting, it is possible that your responses are limiting your recovery. We typically do what has always worked before when we had pain or injury. You can learn new ways of responding and coping.

- *When the pain persists, the health care people you have seen have not been able to fix the problem.***

As soon as there is medical closure, you must shift our focus away from fixing the tissues, and focus on changing the overly-protective nervous system.

There are many ways to do this!

Here are a few to consider ...

- Learn to breathe calmly again.
- Learn to release excess muscle tension.
- Learn more about how your pain system works.
- Practice becoming more aware of normal sensations from your body.
- Become aware of how you may be misinterpreting (as threatening) signals from your body and from your environment.
- Become aware of how your body responds to what you feel. Decide whether these are helpful responses.
- Practice changing how you interpret information from your body.
- Practice changing how you respond to what you feel.
- Notice whether the strategies you use to cope with the pain provide short term relief, and whether as you continue to use them they provide better and longer relief. Some of your coping strategies likely need to be refined or changed.
- Change the way you stretch, and strengthen your body.

Effective pain self-management requires guidance by an experienced health care team or experienced regulated health care professional. Although your medical doctor may not have the time to assist you with much of pain self-management, your medical doctor should have input into any treatment approach you follow to help with your pain.

****You must get a proper medical examination if you have chronic pain. You may have a problem for which you require medical attention!****