

Managing Chronic Pain: Understanding the Persistent Pain Cycle

Acute pain

Acute pain is healthy pain that serves a function: it warns that you've been hurt and prompts you to address the injury. When the injury heals, the pain stops.

Chronic pain

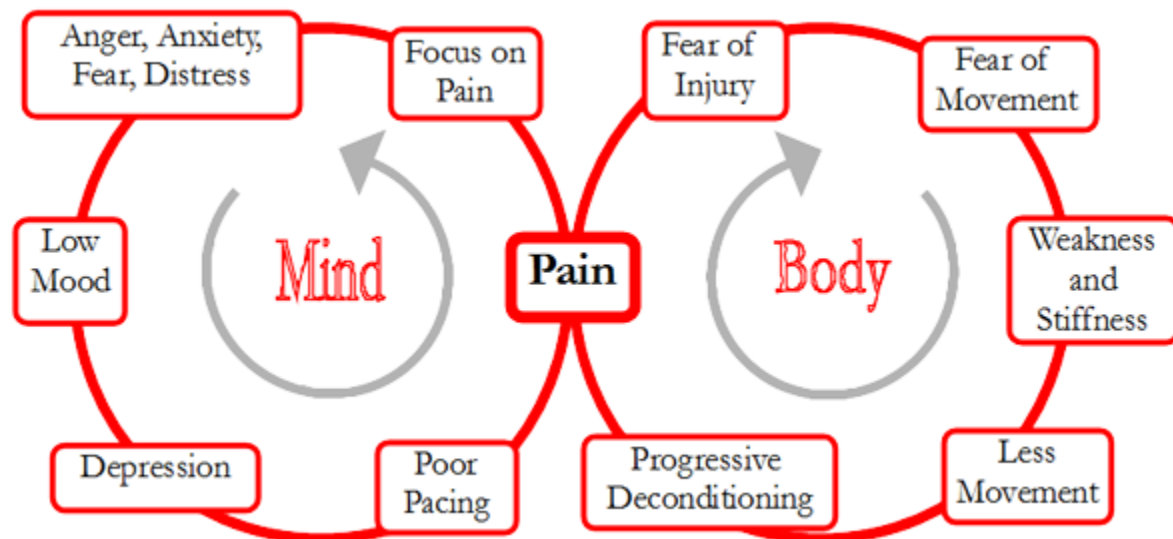
When pain becomes chronic, it ceases to serve a useful function.

Chronic pain persists despite the fact that the injury has healed.

Physical effects include tense muscles, limited mobility, a lack of energy, and changes in appetite.

Emotional effects include depression, anger, anxiety, and fear of re-injury.

It is natural to want to avoid pain or re-injury. However, over time, **avoidance of activity can actually make chronic pain worse.**



When we avoid movement and activity, our bodies become weaker (or deconditioned)

When our bodies get weaker, we feel less able to accomplish tasks

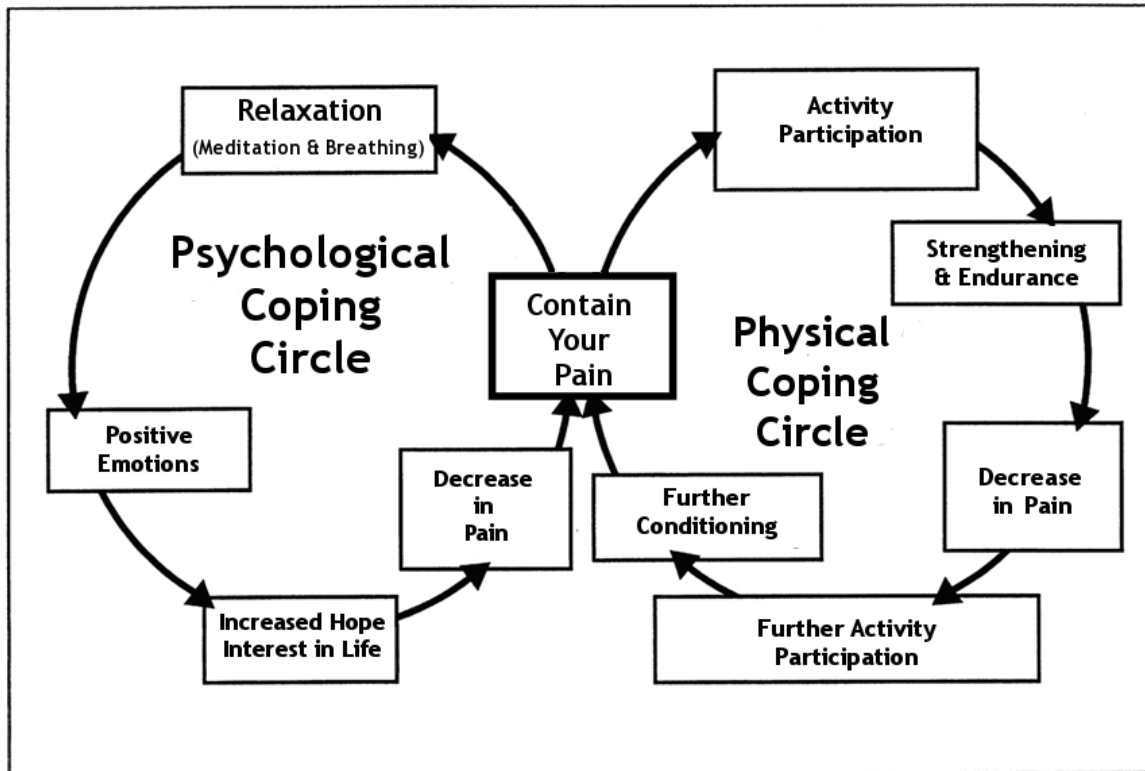
When we feel less able, we do less, and depression, anxiety and pain levels increase

Managing Chronic Pain: Breaking the Persistent Pain Cycle:

Coping: Shift the focus from pain elimination to **restoring functioning**

Coping skills may not make your pain completely vanish.

However, these skills will help you live a more fulfilling, meaningful life *in spite of your pain.*



Skill One: Relaxation

Relaxation skills include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, containment, meditation, and imagery. When you partake in *purposeful relaxation exercises*, you lower your body's stress levels, increase positive emotions, and decrease pain levels.

Skill Two: Activity Participation with Pacing

Pacing is a skill that can help you engage in daily chores, pleasant activities, and exercise.

Pacing involves planning activities and taking breaks before the pain gets too bad.

It's important to **get moving** and, at the same time, **not overdo it!**

Managing Chronic Pain through Pacing

- Pacing is all about finding the middle ground between doing nothing and over-exertion.
- Pacing means being more thoughtful while engaging in activities

Time-based pacing:

Pick the activity you are going to try: _____

1. How long can you usually do this before your pain starts to increase significantly? _____
2. How long do you have to rest before your pain returns to baseline? _____

Plan to try your activity for the amount of time entered in #1

Then, take a break for the amount of time entered in #2.

Restart your activity

For example: if you can stand for 5 minutes before the pain increases, plan to stand for 5 minutes. If it usually takes about 3 minutes of rest for the pain to decrease, plan to take a 3 minute break. Then stand for another 5 minutes. If you can stand for longer, or find that you need more rest, **you can make adjustments as you go.** The key is to be mindful of the clock and not over or under-do it.

SUDS-based pacing*:

Rate your pain level of a scale of 0-10 while resting: _____

Begin your planned activity

After a few minutes, check in with your body and rate your pain level again

When your pain level has risen **two points**, take a rest

Rest until your pain has returned to baseline.

Restart your activity.

*SUDs = subjective units of distress (a fancy way to say “pain rating”)

Put your pacing skills to work!

Exercise!

Though it may seem counterintuitive, **a consistent, well-paced exercise program is one of the best ways to treat chronic pain.**

For most people, **walking** is a great place to start!

Remember to **use pacing** and **be patient** with yourself.



*It is normal for pain to increase when we start a new exercise program. This effect should be temporary, and pain should decrease as your body adjusts to your new exercise schedule.

Pleasant Activity scheduling:

Depression and negative feelings make chronic pain worse. Scheduling pleasant activities into your day can help alleviate depression. **Plan to do one or more pleasant activities every day.** If pain makes it difficult to partake, use Pacing skills.

Daily chores such as housework and laundry can be daunting when you are living with chronic pain. Planning and pacing can help **you break large tasks into small, manageable tasks.**

For example, you may need to break up doing the laundry into parts, taking time to rest in between: carry half the laundry to the machine; rest; carry the second half to the machine; rest; sort the laundry for 5 minutes; rest; finish sorting; rest; put the first load in the machine; rest.... Etc.