



Chronic Pain Workbook

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Unit 1: The Purpose of this Workbook

This workbook may have found its way into your life from your doctor, a friend, or even an internet search. Regardless, if you're reading this now, it is likely because you or someone you love is living with chronic pain.

This workbook combines science-based education and reflection opportunities to help individuals with chronic pain understand and manage their condition better.

Before we dive in, let's make a few things clear about this workbook and chronic pain:

- These pages may introduce you to new ideas about how your pain works. They might even challenge previous beliefs. If you approach this workbook with an open mind, you can get a lot out of it.
- To be in pain or always expecting another painful moment is stressful and takes a lot of courage. To continue looking for help, despite frustration or setbacks, requires a lot of strength and a lot of heart. We know that your pain is real and can be difficult to carry.
- This workbook's goal is to help you get more meaning, value, and joy in daily life. It also will give you steps to create a sense of power over your pain.
- This workbook and its tools, like many parts of life, will not be a "quick fix." Change will require small actions every day for weeks. If you give enough time and attention to the practices in this workbook, changes will likely happen.
- A step forward will be accepting your chronic pain and your role as the expert of your own pain. Doctors, physical therapists, and your friends and family are there to help you along the way, but you are the hero in this process of learning how to best live. Considering the amount of bravery you have already shown in dealing with chronic pain, you have it within you to do this rewarding work.

Activity 1: Using This Workbook

In this unit, we discuss the goals of this workbook, what you can expect from using it for your chronic pain, and how you can be empowered to live with chronic pain.



With support and education, you can live a meaningful and valuable life with chronic pain.



Why did you pick up this workbook, and what do you hope to get out of it? Write your thoughts below.

Unit 2: Acute vs. Chronic Pain

When we think about pain and why it exists, it's helpful to understand the differences between acute pain and chronic pain.

What is acute pain?

- Acute pain, which happens suddenly from an injury, can act as a useful warning signal that danger is present. After stopping whatever caused the initial injury, the pain gradually goes away in several days or weeks.
- For example, when you touch a hot stove, acute pain warns you that something harmful is happening.

How do you treat acute pain?

- The best treatment for acute pain is usually rest of the injured area to allow for healing and potentially pain medications of different strengths.

What is chronic pain?

- Chronic pain lasts for three or more months and can occur for many reasons: after an injury, from inflammation (swelling), or from a change in how our brain understands messages from the rest of the body.
- When pain becomes chronic, there is no longer a threat, and the alarm may be "stuck in the on-mode" or detecting danger when there is none.
- For example, chronic pain could be pain in your lower back that has lasted for six months.

How do you treat chronic pain?

- The cause of chronic pain is often difficult to find, and figuring out the cause doesn't always change the best way to treat and manage it.
- For chronic pain, movement and activity are important to improve function. Short-term pain medications do not necessarily lessen chronic pain and may even make chronic pain worse.
- We cannot wait for the pain to lessen before returning to normal activities in our lives. Chronic pain might change over time, but waiting for it to go away is usually not a possible long-term solution.

Activity 2:

Recalling Your Unique Pain Story

In this unit, we discussed the differences between acute and chronic pain. Just as every person is unique, so is your story.



Acute pain and chronic pain are very different, so the best ways to treat them are also different.



Reflect below on when you began to feel your pain. What was going on when it began?

Unit 3: Myths & Truths about Chronic Pain

Because our understanding of pain is an ongoing science and is very complicated, this workbook cannot address all aspects of pain. However, here we present three of the most common myths about chronic pain. Many doctors and patients may mistakenly believe in these myths, but they are untrue and can get in the way of managing your chronic pain.

 Myth 1: Ongoing pain indicates that there is ongoing damage or injury to the body.

 Fact: Ongoing pain does not necessarily mean that tissue damage or other harm is still happening in your body. In fact, many research studies have compared individuals with and without pain and then looked at their imaging (like X-rays or MRI's from clinical visits). Scientists found that there were many individuals with tissue "damage" or bone "abnormalities" who had no pain. They also found many patients with obvious pain who had nothing technically "wrong" or "abnormal" with their muscles or bones.ⁱ These studies showed scientists that just because someone has damage to a tissue or bone does not mean they will have pain, and just because someone has ongoing pain does not mean they will have a broken bone or damaged body part.

 Myth 2: If a doctor can't find something wrong with your body from lab testing or imaging, then your pain isn't real or it's "all in your head."

 Fact: Although the study of pain is advancing every day, many aspects of pain remain a mystery. Additionally, the experience of pain is affected by many things, as you can see in the picture on the next page. Just because an image or lab test doesn't give an exact reason for pain does not mean that your pain is any less "real" or deeply challenging.

✘ Myth 3: The only way to manage chronic pain is with pain medications, surgery, and injections.

✔ Fact: Medications, surgery, or injections may play a role in the treatment of your chronic pain. However, the most effective treatments for chronic pain include concepts in this workbook like education, behavior change, and reflection on your beliefs around your pain. In fact, many studies have found interventions like these to be as helpful as medication with far fewer side effects or risks. Also, these interventions can improve how medications work on your pain when done together in treatment.ⁱⁱ

Below is a diagram of factors that can affect your pain experience.



Activity 3: Myths and Truths

In this unit, we discussed some of the common misunderstandings about chronic pain and its treatment.



Learning from trusted sources about your particular pain will help you get the best treatment possible.

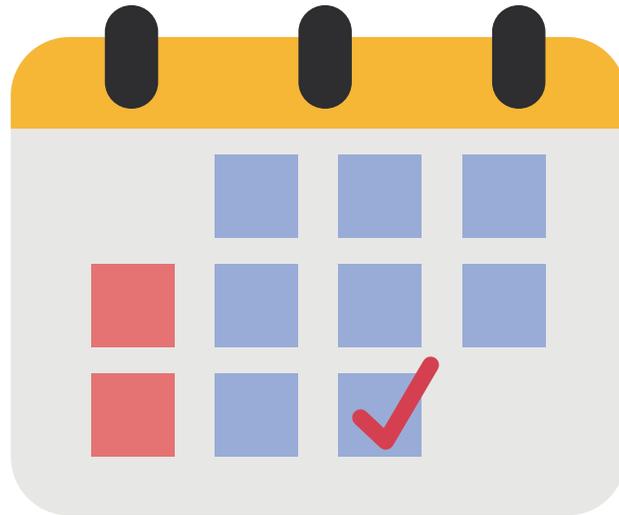


Are any of the myths or facts surprising to you?

Unit 4: Knowing Your Pain

Chronic pain can often seem like an ongoing, never-changing challenge. However, your pain most likely changes throughout the day and weeks, and there is likely a pattern to your pain. If you increase your knowledge about your pain, you can increase behaviors that help your pain and limit activities that cause more pain or stress. Additionally, chronic pain can often bring with it many unwelcome friends, such as chronic tiredness, muscle tension, stress, or bad moods. It's important to pay attention to these symptoms, too.

By being mindful and tracking when your pain is the worst, what it feels like, and what events or feelings seem to trigger your pain, you will be more empowered to act in ways that lessen your pain. Overall, you will have a better understanding of how to best care for yourself.



Activity 4A: Tracking Your Pain



The more you can understand and learn about your personal pain experience, the better prepared you will be to manage your pain with tools from this workbook.



In the table on the next page, you will be able to track your pain for the next 7 days. Tracking your pain will give you information to look back on and find patterns in your day-to-day life. In the space below, reflect on some patterns you've already noticed related to your pain—times of day it flares (gets worse), what helps, and what worsens it.

Day of the week	Today, my pain was (circle your response below) than usual.	Events or activities that helped today	Events or activities that hurt today
Sunday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Monday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Tuesday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Wednesday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Thursday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Friday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		
Saturday	much worse a little worse the same a little better much better		



Activity 4B: Knowing Your Pain

After tracking your pain for a week, look through your chart. Do you see any patterns, especially by time or activity type?

Are there any patterns between your mood and pain level?

Write any other notes or patterns you saw during the past week of tracking.

Unit 5: Making Routines that Work for You

For many patients with chronic pain, managing daily tasks can be difficult because pain is tiring and unpredictable. On a “good day” (a day where pain is less present than usual), you may be tempted to do many activities and chores. After this extra busy day, your pain might be worse than normal. You may even become very tired for a few days after. This cycle of high activity followed by exhaustion and worse pain makes planning difficult. It can even make you feel stuck.

Ideally, your daily and weekly life has activities that you enjoy. You also need enough energy to do chores and take care of yourself. For that reason, pacing is an important idea and goal.

Pacing means creating a regular schedule that accounts for your pain, but is not ruled by it. Creating this type of flexible but goal-oriented plan will help you avoid the busy and exhausted cycle that is common for people with chronic pain. Pacing will mean asking yourself to do small, challenging tasks regularly. It also means allowing yourself enough rest and recovery.



After you practice pacing (living by a balanced schedule) for a little while, you might find you are slowly able to do activities that pain had previously interrupted.

5 Rules for a Balanced Schedule

- 1** Rule 1: set SMART, inspiring goals
While it can be easy to start changes, it can be difficult to keep them going. Following through with goals can be easier when you use the SMART goal method (you will do this on the next page).
- 2** Rule 2: Start small
Changing daily habits can be challenging for everyone, but even more so for those with chronic pain. One tool to help you increase useful and enjoyable activities is to start with very small, easy habits. Building small changes slowly works!
- 3** Rule 3: Practice consistency
Even though you may be taking small steps, there will still be discomfort in changing your behavior. Consistency means sticking with your plans, despite the discomfort. As a note, we use the word “discomfort” on purpose, and not “increased pain” or “exhaustion.” If the difficulty goes beyond discomfort, your small steps may be too big for right now, and you may need to pace yourself.
- 4** Rule 4: Overcome setbacks
In almost any form of behavior change, setbacks can happen. In the past, you might have tried to do too many things at once and then quit because of exhaustion. For your SMART goal, we want to plan for when things do NOT go to as planned and how to keep trying. Effort is everything. Doing 80% of something is better than doing none of it!
- 5** Rule 5: Celebrate your progress
Having a place to track and celebrate your small accomplishments is a great practice. The work you’re doing is challenging. Each day that you set out and accomplish your task, you have something to be proud of and to celebrate!



Activity 5: Setting A SMART Goal

Specific: What is one activity you'd like to add back into your life?

Measurable: How can you notice change or progress each day?

Atttractive: Why do you want to do this? Why does it excite you?

Realistic: Is this doable in your current life situation?

Time Bound: By when will you accomplish this? How will you know you succeeded?

Obstacles: What might get in the way of doing this? Have you ever tried this before and had it fail? If so, with compassion, reflect on why!

Unit 6: The Relaxation Response

Pacing your activities, taking small steps, and figuring out how to balance tasks with rest is very important to take back control from your pain. To keep this cycle balanced, it can be helpful to learn more about how regular rest can help your chronic pain.

Maybe before reading this workbook, you had heard of the importance of relaxing your body's nervous system to help your chronic pain. Our nervous system has two main responses: the parasympathetic and sympathetic responses. The sympathetic response is our active, "fight-or-flight" response. It is our stress response and includes sweating, a faster heartbeat, and feeling tense. The parasympathetic response is the relaxed, "rest and digest" system. It is the system used when there is no danger and includes deep breathing, a slower heartbeat, and feeling peaceful.

Pain can cause the body to always be stressed, or always be in the "on high alert" mode of the sympathetic response. This can partially explain the symptoms that happen with your chronic pain: muscle tension, tiredness, sleeplessness, or bad moods.

Additionally, the more our brains are threatened or on high alert, the more often we interpret sensations from the body as painful. This connection between stress, pain, and threat detection can be a terrible cycle. It is also the reason behind why people with a history of trauma (i.e. deeply upsetting emotional or physical events or harm) may have worse chronic pain; their brains and bodies have trouble relaxing. Though this is a complicated subject, the good news is that science has tools to help you tap into your resting state and into relaxation.



When you practice relaxation exercises (like the ones on the next two pages) for a few minutes every day, your chronic pain can decrease and the related symptoms can improve as well.



Activity 6A: The Power of Breathing

One of the ways you can access your “relaxation response” is by paying attention to your breathing and breathing deeply. When anxious or stressed, our breathing can become shallow, or we might even hold our breath. The exercise below can guide you into deep breaths, which can bring relaxation to your body.

Note: If not done correctly, breathing exercises can cause light-headedness and dizziness in patients, especially those with low blood pressure. If you have any questions, ask your doctor before doing this exercise. Always stand or sit up slowly.

1. Find a comfortable and safe place to sit or lie down. Wiggle your feet and arms, and then settle into a comfortable resting position.
 - Notice how your body currently feels.
2. Place one hand on your belly and your other hand on your chest.
 - Notice how you are currently breathing, without any judgment. Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow?
3. Slowly, take a deep breath in through your nose.*
 - Notice how the hand on your belly or chest may rise.
4. When it feels right to you, slowly and fully release your breath; try to gently push out all of the air.
5. Continue with more slow, deep breaths for one to ten minutes.
 - Notice how you feel after this exercise. Has your energy changed? Do you feel calmer?

*If you have been diagnosed with COPD or have other breathing concerns, you can also do this exercise by breathing through your mouth.



Activity 6B: Muscle Relaxation

Beyond your chronic pain, you may experience other difficult symptoms, such as tiredness, headaches, difficulty concentrating, sad moods, or muscle tension at places different from where your pain is. The body can tense up in response to stress and pain, almost as if to protect the body from more pain. Though helpful in acute injury, this response can worsen chronic pain and cause stiffness and tension all over. Exercises, like the one below, can help us relax our muscles.

1. Find a comfortable and safe place to sit or lie down. Take note of how your body currently feels. Wiggle your feet and arms, and then settle into a comfortable resting position. Take slow, deep breaths.
2. Beginning with your toes and feet, squeeze and clench your right foot, and then relax it. As you inhale, squeeze your other foot, and as you exhale, release it.
3. Slowly move up your body, squeezing your legs, then your belly, then your right and left arms.
4. Continue until you reach your neck and face. Squeeze up your shoulders to your ears, and release. Scrunch up your face, and then release.
5. Finally, take a few more calming, deep breaths. Notice how you feel after checking in and relaxing each part of your body.

Unit 7: Mindfulness

Pain is a full body experience. Anyone who has experienced bad acute pain or chronic pain knows that ignoring it or “shaking it off” is impossible. Pain demands to be felt when it is happening. While we cannot simply ignore pain, the power of where we place our attention is important.

Mindfulness is the ability to be present to what is going on around and within you without judging or getting distracted by your thoughts. It can be helpful with chronic pain because it can help you separate the sensation of pain in your body. Mindfulness can also help you to continue past mild discomfort in pursuit of meaningful daily life.

Exploring the concept of mindfulness is a lifelong process, and it is not something you achieve, but rather a skill you work on every day! Try exploring the meditation on the next page as a simple introduction to mindfulness.



Mindfulness can help you lead a meaningful life by allowing you to separate the sensation of pain from your body and move past discomfort in a safe, healthy way.



Activity 7: 5 Senses

A classic mindfulness tool is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. It is a helpful tool to bring your attention to the present moment. As you read through the exercise, you can write down your responses or simply say them.

Take a deep breath.

To begin, list five things you can see around you now.

Take a slow breath.

List four things you can feel or touch right now.

Take another breath.

List three things you can hear in your surroundings.

Take a deep breath.

List two things you can smell.

Take one more slow, grounding breath.

List one thing you can taste.

Breathe one last calming breath.

Unit 8: Your Brain & Your Pain

Has your first impression about a person ever been completely wrong?

Here's a story. You meet a coworker at your new job. She is very quiet around you, but she seems more talkative around another colleague. You interpret her behavior as disinterest in you, and you begin to dislike her in return. A few months later, you begin to become friends during a project. You then ask her about your first few days on the job, and she explains that she was quiet because you intimidated her. All along, you have been holding a feeling of dislike and thinking she disliked you, when in reality, she thought you seemed great!

This scenario may seem unrelated to your chronic pain, but it is an example of how our thoughts and beliefs can influence the way we feel and experience the world. Our brain determines whether a bodily sensation is painful or not. This process is complex and not always something we are aware of. Therefore, our minds – specifically our thoughts and beliefs – play a big role in chronic pain management. You might be thinking...

- "My pain is the worst, and I'm always going to feel like this."
- "This pain means the treatment isn't working."
- "I can't do anything I care about!"

While these thoughts are understandable, they are also not true or helpful. Pain comes and goes. Treatments can take time to work, or they might work some days better than other days. Pain can stop the normal way you do things, but it can't take away everything good in your life.

The way we think about our pain impacts our feelings, hopes, and actions. Paying attention to our thoughts is an important component of living with chronic pain. The purpose is not to be sunny and positive all the time, or to try to deny our pain. Rather, the purpose is to keep perspective and to focus on what is true and helpful.



Activity 8: Reflecting On Beliefs

Think about common things you tell yourself when you are down about your pain. List those thoughts below.

Now, pick one of those thoughts. Ask yourself, is this thought 100% true? If not, how so?

Is this thought helpful? Does it encourage me to keep trying, or does it make me feel worse? How so?

Is there a way to respond to this thought and to argue against it? Let's turn it into a more true, helpful belief.



Not all thoughts are true or rational, and learning to question your thoughts takes practice. Challenging your thoughts that weaken your ability to feel empowered is healthy and brave.

Unit 9: Living Your Values

Life as you now know it may be different due to chronic pain. However, you can still live by the ideals you valued before the pain.



Activity 9: Living Your Values

What are 3 values that are the most important to you, and why? Examples might be family, gratitude, enjoyment, strength, etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

For each of these values listed, brainstorm a few small actions that might represent you living by this value. You can also write the ways you've lived out this value before, and reflect on ways you can change those actions to fit your life now.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Resources

Other helpful tools:

Caudill, Margaret. *Managing Pain before It Manages You*. The Guilford Press, 2016.

Louw, Adriaan. *Why Do I Hurt?: a Patient Book about the Neuroscience of Pain*. Orthopedic Physical Therapy Products, 2013.

Turk, Dennis C., and Frits Winter. *The Pain Survival Guide: How to Reclaim Your Life* (Pbk). APA LifeTools, 2005.

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ii. Gatchel RJ, Okifuji A. Evidence-based scientific data documenting the treatment and cost-effectiveness of comprehensive pain programs for chronic nonmalignant pain. *J Pain*. 2006;7(11):779-793. doi:10.1016/j.jpain.2006.08.005

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