

Using Self-Talk to Manage Pain

Generally, you can manage your chronic pain in various ways:

1. Controlling pain through **Self-Talk**.
2. **Relaxing** to control emotions and muscle tension that makes pain worse.
3. **Focusing** attention away from pain, also known as distraction.
4. Increasing **activities** not associated with pain.

Each person is unique. You are unique. Each individual pain problem may be different from anyone else's. Therefore, each of the above methods may be relevant to some, but not to all. Here, we will focus on Self-Talk.

Self-Talk

The things you say to yourself (your thoughts) about pain can help you to change your pain experience.

You have already taken an important first step.

By being involved in a self-help pain management program, you have shown that you understand that you can learn to control your pain rather than having the pain control you. What you say to yourself about the pain can make it more or less intense. You can learn to think in ways that ease or lessen the painful experience. It is helpful to remind yourself that you can control your pain. **This is the first step.**

“Self-Talk” Group

What do you see or recognize in yourself?
What is your sub-personality?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The victim | <input type="checkbox"/> The perfectionist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The critic | <input type="checkbox"/> The worrier |
-

Sub-personality: The victim

(promotes depression)

Affects me:

Not at all _____ Very much
0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one number)

Favourite expression: _____

Illustrate negative self-talk in these situations:

- Work

 - Relationships

 - Pain
-

Sub-personality: The critic

(promotes low self-esteem)

Affects me:

Not at all _____ Very much
0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one number)

Favourite expression: _____

Illustrate negative self-talk in these situations:

- Work

 - Relationships

 - Pain
-

Sub-personality: The perfectionist**(promotes chronic stress and burnout)****Affects me:**

Not at all _____ Very much
0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one number)

Favourite expression: _____

Illustrate negative self-talk in these situations:

- Work

 - Relationships

 - Pain
-

Sub-personality: The worrier
(promotes anxiety)

Affects me:

Not at all _____ Very much
0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one number)

Favourite expression:

Illustrate negative self-talk in these situations:

- Work

 - Relationships

 - Pain
-

Examples of negative self-talk about chronic pain

Identify your own negative statements.

- This pain is terrible, I don't know how much longer I can take it.

 - I can't do that because of this pain I am in.

 - Things are really bad, I'm going to have to see the doctor about this.

 - I can't stop thinking about this pain; I feel like a hypochondriac.
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Examples of positive self-talk for chronic pain

- ✓ I've had flare-ups in the pain before, and it settles down again; nothing to worry about.

 - ✓ I'm going to hurt as much whether I do it or not, so I might as well do it.

 - ✓ The doctors don't have any answers for this; I'm just going to have to get going on my own.
-

Positive self-talk before you feel pain again

Below are some examples of self-talk that work for people with chronic pain use:

“Sitting and worrying about pain does not help. I’ll make plans to control it”.

“I’m not hurting right now. By thinking of other things I can make this good feeling last longer. I’ll make the pain less severe when it comes.”

Thoughts similar to these examples can help you too. Come up with several thoughts you might use. Write these in the blanks below. If you have more ideas than there is space here, please ask for more paper.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Practicing positive self-talk while you are in pain

These are some of the examples of things you can tell yourself when you are experiencing pain.

1. "I'm hurting. Instead of letting the pain push me around and control me, I am going to try to reduce its effects. **I will take control.**"
2. "It does not help to lie and hurt. Perhaps if I use this pain as a chance to control my reactions, I won't hurt as bad in the future."

Remember, you probably will feel **anxious and tense** with pain. Think of the tension and pain as signals for you to work towards coping with your pain. Do not expect to control the pain quickly.

You are most likely to succeed if you work steadily and consistently at countering your negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones.

Come up with your own positive, coping statements. List several things you can tell yourself while you are hurting.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Shel Silverstein – A light in the Attic

Whatif

Last night, while I lay thinking here,
Some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
And pranced and partied all night long
And sang their same old Whatif song:
 Whatif I'm dumb in school?
Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?
 Whatif I get beat up?
 Whatif there's poison in my cup?
 Whatif I start to cry?
 Whatif I get sick and die?
 Whatif I flunk the test?
Whatif green hair grows on my chest?
 Whatif nobody likes me?
Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?
 Whatif I don't grow taller?
Whatif my head starts getting smaller?
 Whatif the fish won't bite?
 Whatif the wind tears up my kite?
 Whatif they start a war?
 Whatif my parents get divorced?
 Whatif the bus is late?
Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?
 Whatif I tear my pants?
 Whatif I never learn to dance?
Everything seem well, and then
The nighttime Whatifs strike again!

I can't go on ...

I really

can't go on

I swear

I can't go on

so ...

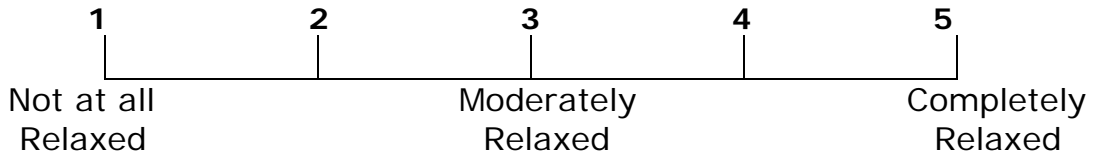
I guess

I'll get up

and go on

Relaxation rating

Use the rating scale to rate your level of relaxation both before and after your relaxation session.



Notes

Gate theory of pain

What opens pain gate:

- Stress
- Dwelling on pain
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Anxiety/worry

What closes pain gate:

- Relaxation
- Heat or cold measures
- Physical therapy
- Positive attitude
- Positive self-talk

