



Positive thoughts

Living with chronic pain

Living with pain can be hard, especially if it's long-term — or chronic — pain. It can impact your sleep, your mood and even your relationships. If you have chronic pain, you also have a greater risk of developing depression. It's important to take care of your emotional and physical health when dealing with pain.

Use healthy thinking to cope with pain

The good news is you can learn to better manage chronic pain by changing the way you think about it. Whether you work on your own or with a counselor, practicing these three steps can help you recognize negative thoughts, improve your outlook and better manage your pain.

The goal is to have encouraging thoughts come naturally. This can take time. But it gets easier with daily practice.

Stop — Notice your thoughts. When you have a negative thought, stop it in its tracks and write it down.

Ask — Look at that thought and ask yourself whether it's helpful or unhelpful.

Choose — Choose a new, helpful thought to replace a negative one. Ask yourself what effect believing that thought will have on you. Think about what might happen if you tried to believe a healthier thought instead.

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Change your outlook

How do you approach problems? Do you see only limits or can you see what is possible? To change your outlook, become aware of those thinking patterns.

Some patterns to avoid:

Focusing on the negative — This is sometimes called filtering. You filter out the good and focus only on the bad. Instead, focus on what's good in your life.

Overgeneralizing — This is taking one example and saying it's true for everything. Avoid using words such as "never" and "always."

All-or-nothing thinking — This is also called black-or-white thinking. This thinking is rarely helpful and can prevent you from finding solutions. Look for what is possible.

Choose your thoughts

Once you're aware of your thoughts, you can start to choose new and helpful ones.

Here are a couple of examples to consider:

Stop your negative thought	Ask what type of thought you had	Choose a helpful thought
"I haven't had too much pain today, but I know that won't last for long."	Focusing on negative	"Sure, not all days will be pain-free. But I've had some days without pain lately, so I know that not every day will be painful."
"There's really nothing I can do to help my pain."	Overgeneralizing	"Some days my pain may feel tough to manage, but there have been days when it has been better. And there are things that I can do to help my pain."
"Sitting for more than two hours is very hard, so there's no way I can ever go back to my job."	All or nothing	"I may not be able to return to my exact job, but I can be open to other arrangements that will allow me to continue to work in a similar way."

Put positive thinking into action today. With daily practice, helpful thoughts can come naturally to you.

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