

Managing Pain Flares

July 2024



Materials played in class

5 Minute Guided Self-Compassion Meditation

<https://youtu.be/4MxVprypBPA>

The Power of Exercise from the American Chronic Pain Association

<https://youtu.be/-4DMwbmQtkQ>

Short Self Compassion Breathing Break

<https://youtu.be/TFew6Vu4BAI>

Resources to further your learning

<https://www.northernpaincentre.com.au/wellness/chronic-pain-tools/flare-management/>

<https://www.bezzyms.com/discover/mental-well-being-ms/health-a-flare-does-not-mean-youve-done-something-wrong/>

<https://www.bezzypsa.com/discover/living-well-psa/health-what-is-the-spoon-theory/>

<https://www.spoonieday.com/> (a free app)

<https://www.curablehealth.com/makepdf/1/172/16/h/5393410448162816/flare-ups-workbook.pdf>

<https://www.curablehealth.com/blog/four-steps-to-overcoming-fear-of-movement>

Retrain Your Brain: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in 7 Weeks: A Workbook for Managing Depression and Anxiety by Seth Gillihan PhD

<https://sethgillihan.com/books/retrain-your-brain/>

“Self-compassion is simply the process of turning compassion inward. We are kind and understanding rather than harshly self-critical when we fail, make mistakes or feel inadequate. We give ourselves support and encouragement rather than being cold and judgmental when challenges and difficulty arise in our lives. Research indicates that self-compassion is one of the most powerful sources of coping and resilience we have available to us, radically improving our mental and physical wellbeing. It motivates us to make changes and reach our goals not because we’re inadequate, but because we care and want to be happy. The website below offers information about self-compassion, as well as research, guided practices and a way to test your

own self-compassion level. It's a good place to start on your journey of leaning to be more self-compassionate."

<https://self-compassion.org/>

Dear Future Me Letter

Writing can be a powerful tool for getting emotions flowing and tapping into your inner thoughts and feelings. It serves as a cathartic outlet, allowing you to express yourself freely. The act of writing to your future self can help you gain clarity and insight into your present circumstances. It's a good way to remind yourself this is temporary and offer yourself words of encouragement during times of challenge. It encourages self-expression, as you can freely pour out your thoughts, dreams, and challenges onto the paper.

There are a couple of ways to do this. You can write or type a letter and then mail it to yourself at some point in the future. When the time comes, open the letter and take in the wisdom, insights, and encouragement you provided to yourself. Reflect on what's changed and what's the same. And, of course, there's a website and app you can use:

<https://www.futureme.org/>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.futureme>

Support Groups

It can be helpful to identify other people or communities to engage with. Sometimes groups offer a space to connect with others facing similar circumstances or challenges. It could be a support group focused on chronic pain, or maybe it's an AA meeting or a religious or spiritual group. Shop around a bit to find a structure and people that you resonate with. There are some wonderful online groups which can be helpful if it's difficult to leave your home due to a flare-up. To find local groups, a Google search or asking for referrals can be helpful. Here a few ideas to get you started:

[Well Spouse Association](#) Support for spousal caregivers.

[Brain Injury Association of America](#)

<https://invisibledisabilities.org/programs/>

<https://invisibledisabilities.org/>

<https://chronicpainanonymous.org/>

<https://painconnection.org/support-groups/national-support-groups-for-chronic-pain/>

Living with pain can affect all areas of your life. No one can do it alone.

If you are experiencing a suicidal crisis or mental health related distress, please contact 988 via phone or text. This is free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day. You may also find information on their website www.988lifeline.org

If you are experiencing food or housing insecurity, and need access to mental health and other social services call 211. This free service will connect you with local organizations offering services. You may also find information on their website www.211.org

Worksheet:

Symptom Curiosity

When symptoms flare-up, the natural response from the brain is to ask “why.”

Why is this happening? Why now? Why there? Most humans have been conditioned to seek these answers in the physical, and to conclude that something must be very wrong in the tissues of their body. Sometimes, that is true. Sometimes, it is not.

When symptoms become chronic and flare-ups are more frequent, it is likely that a flare-up is being caused (or exacerbated) by a learned response in the brain and nervous system. In other words, the brain is perceiving something (a thought, emotion, or situation) as a threat. To get to the bottom of what your brain is afraid of, complete the worksheet below.

What’s changing in your mind?

Make a list of all the thoughts and emotions you’ve experienced in the past week that could possibly make your brain feel unsafe - rational or not.

What’s changing in your body?

Over the past week, can you think of any times when your body felt more tense than usual, or when symptoms began to flare up? Write down what you were doing, feeling, and thinking during these times. Write down where you were and who you were with. Look for any patterns.

What's changing around you?

Think about the past week and the week ahead. What changes (both positive and challenging) have been happening around you? Include changes related to your relationships, career, physical environment, upcoming or past events and anything else that feels important to you.



Circle each change that your brain could possibly perceive as a threat.

Remember that positive changes can be intimidating and scary to the brain, too!

Write a note to your brain explaining why you are capable of handling these changes without the help of your fight-or-flight system.

