

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) & Chronic Pain

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“Chronic pain is an invisible epidemic that has a profound effect on people and society”

Almost 1 in 3 people in the U.S. have chronic pain

Source: <https://www.theacpa.org/recent-news/september-pain-awareness-month-inside-out-campaign-acpainsideout/>

Acute pain:

(Ex) post-surgical pain, post-traumatic pain

Chronic pain:

- does NOT resolve with tissue healing.
- issue around “perception” of pain
- amplified by stressors like underlying psychiatric illness, confirmatory bias or anxiety issues

Emotions (feelings) associated with pain

- Depression (not being able to do what used to do)
- Guilt (see above, + impact on others)
- Fear - mortality, lack of independence / reliance on others
- Grief/loss - “new normal”
- Anger / irritability

Fear of Invalidation

- If I complain about pain, I will be judged
- The Dr. will think I am an addict if I ask for pain medications
- **Many people conceal their pain because of stigma and shame**

Before referral: Validation

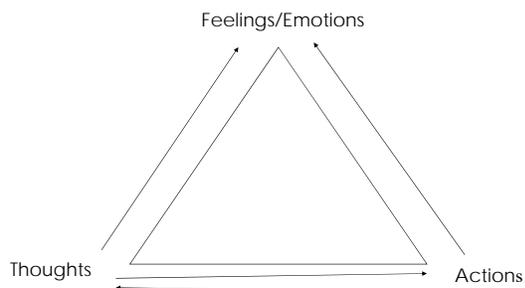
Validate the pain: real, not "all in your head!"
 value of alternatives: cost v. benefit
 enlarge the menu of options: team approach

Nervous system

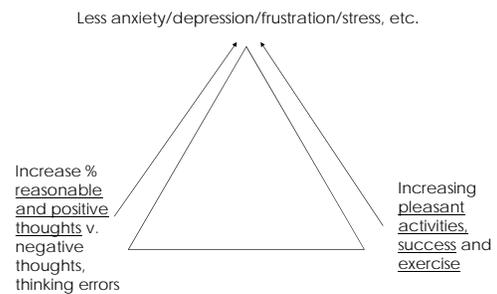
We work on the parasympathetic nervous system using:

CBT, including mindfulness, relaxation, exercise, thinking changes, support/validation

Your personality is a 3 part system:
 CBT: Changing your thoughts and your actions can change your feelings



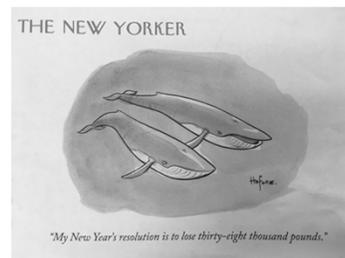
CBT: Changing your *thoughts* and your *actions* can change your *feelings*



Achieving Behavioral Change

1. Plan ahead: Schedule time/place in advance
2. Incremental change, not Mount Everest on day one
3. Make a commitment to another person
4. Make a "to do" list
5. Anticipate problems and try to prevent them

Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard, Chip Heath and Dan Heath



Some types of thinking errors

- *Exaggerations*: I won't be able to do anything, anymore!
- *Unreasonable expectations*: Now I'll never be in the Olympics!
- *Jumping to conclusions*: My husband will leave me.
- *Catastrophizing/snowballing*: "I'll never have any fun anymore."

Don't believe everything that you think!

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

-(Hamlet to Horatio) Shakespeare

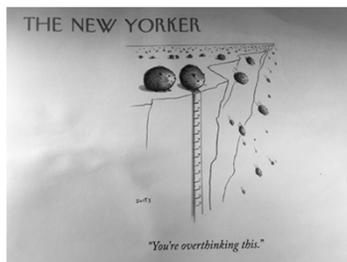
Which thinking errors do you hear from patients with chronic pain?

Common thinking errors in Dr.'s office

- Nothing will help.
- I can't do anything anymore.
- I've tried everything: I'm doomed.

Context and narrative (the story) are very important in pain perception

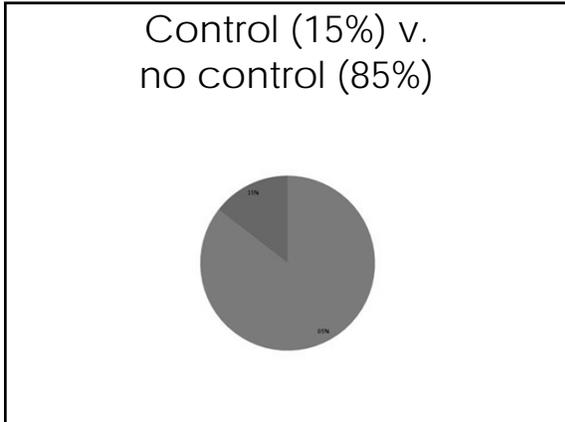
Anxious overthinking



Fixed v. Growth Thinking

Fixed: I can't do fractions! v.

Growth: I can't do fractions "yet."



Situation: What Happened?	Automatic thought: What did you think?	How did you feel?	More reasonable thought: What else could you think?	Now, How Do You Feel?	Rate your current belief in the old automatic thought. (0-100)
Difficult doc appt	My life is over It will always be like this	Angry hopeless depressed	My Dr./PT /Therapist can help me with a plan	relieved	
Having chronic pain	This is going to be it/get worse	Anxious stressed	I can distract myself, + use other tools to think about things I can still do. Doesn't mean I cant make a contribution	Better	
Pain was really bad	This is all there is	Down, defeated,	I will exercise and feel better	Better	

Change the story, change the world

Two steps for changing the brain:

1. Notice the behavior or thinking you want to change (old neural pathway)
2. Practice changing old to new (to the new neural pathway)

Warning: Changing thinking or behavior might take 3+ weeks of practice (*Outliers*: by Malcolm Gladwell)

- Mindfulness helps us
- notice thoughts, feelings, actions, without acting on or judging them
 - accept, let go of what we can't control
 - slow down impulsivity and emotion dysregulation
 - reduce stress as we notice thoughts feelings without acting on them



[UCLA mindfulness for pain](#)

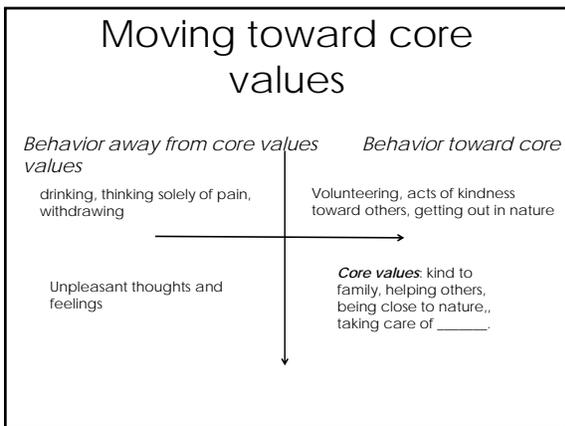
Be tough in the way a blade of grass is: rooted, willing to lean, and at peace with what is around it.

-Natalie Goldberg

Unhooking yourself from your thoughts (ACT)

I am in pain

- I 'm having the thought that my shoulder hurts
- I 'm aware that I am having the thought that my shoulder hurts
- I am noticing that I am aware that I am having the thought that my shoulder hurts.



Hope is the little thing with feathers that perches in our souls.

-Emily Dickinson

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*UCLA Free Meditations: Meditation for Working with Difficulties, https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&inf_redirect=1

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