

Individuals living with chronic pain endure significant physical and emotional distress. But how a patient responds to their pain condition can determine how one will suffer. Here are some behavioral factors that may reduce the misery associated with chronic pain:

1. Develop Realistic Expectations

It is unlikely that you will find a medical treatment that will alleviate all your pain. Patients who are continuously seeking 100% pain relief are often disappointed and frustrated. Set optimistic, yet realistic goals for treatment outcomes.

2. Promote a Positive Outlook

Negative thoughts will exacerbate chronic pain. Statements such as, "I'm going to be crippled, I can't deal with this pain, I'm a burden to my family," are not productive. Depression and anxiety are common among patients living with chronic pain. Find support in family, clergy, or mental health professionals in order to cultivate an optimistic, healthier attitude.

3. Initiate Active Coping Skills

Take an honest assessment of your efforts to cope with your pain. Could you be doing more to improve your health? Are you relying too much on your physician or others to treat your pain? Patients who use the following active coping skills to manage pain report better quality of life, more control over their pain, and less physical disability:

Practice Relaxation Exercises:

Relaxation (i.e. deep abdominal breathing or progressive muscle relaxation) is an important skill for managing pain. Relaxation reduces pain caused by muscle tension, promotes rest and sleep, and decreases anxiety, frustration, anger, and discouragement. Practice this technique daily to appreciate its benefits.

Distraction: Your brain plays the primary role in perceiving pain signals. Keeping busy with pleasurable activities, socializing, or hobbies can take your mind off your body. The more a patient focuses on their particular painful body part, the worse it tends to be.

Weight management: Many patients with chronic pain, gain weight due to a sedentary lifestyle. This tends to exacerbate their pain condition. Following a strict diet and a physician-approved exercise plan will help you successfully manage your weight.

Identifying a sense of control over your pain: Use a pain diary to identify pain frequency and intensity of pain episodes. Also attempt to track stress-related triggers. Attempting to exert control over a pain condition may reduce its overall impact on quality of life.

Living better

with



Chronic Pain

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4. Begin Pacing Activities

Do not avoid healthy, active, and pleasurable activities because of pain. Instead, set a time limit on these activities, take a break, and resume later. Activities that aggravate pain are not necessarily harmful to your body, but instead promote physical conditioning. Without regular physical conditioning, the body will experience impairment in mobility, muscle strength, and cardiovascular fitness, leading to greater disability, discomfort, and pain.

5. Maintain Independence

Growing dependence on others will lead to poor self-worth, a negative outlook on the future, feeling like a burden on our loved ones, etc. Be flexible about changing household roles: perhaps you are no longer physically able to mow the lawn, but you can cook or write out the bills for your family.

6. Learn Acceptance

Proper acceptance of your chronic pain condition means the opportunity to set new life goals and priorities. Acceptance does not equal resignation, but instead offers hope for a happy, healthy lifestyle despite managing a chronic pain condition.



Dr. Lisson is a licensed clinical psychologist in the states of North Carolina and Florida and is fellowship-trained in health psychology. Her expertise includes working with patients who experience stress related to their medical problems, promoting better medical compliance and health care behavior and evaluating patients for surgical risk and readiness. To learn more about Dr. Lisson and her solo, private practice at the Center for Health Solutions, PLLC, please visit her website at www.gaillisson.com.