



The Insider's Guide to Mind-Body Medicine: Tips for Reducing Pain and Negative Emotions

Pain sufferers exploring mind-body medicine as an alternative to drugs often wonder how this approach works and whether it will work in their particular case. In this special report we'll tell you a little bit about how mind-body medicine works and give you a sample of techniques similar to those the NeuroBehavioral Pain Management Program teaches participants.

First, some mind-body concepts

Mind-body medicine is based on some observations about how thought and action are connected by way of our nervous systems. Basically, it proposes that our experience of what we feel is real happens when a thought or image held in our mind searches through our body and becomes connected to or embodied in our physical sensations.

Let's try a simple mind-body experiment: Imagine a yellow lemon sitting on a white plate. Now, in your imagination, take a sharp paring knife with a serrated blade and slowly cut the end off of the lemon. Imagine hearing the knife blade click on the plate. Then move the knife blade over about half an inch and slice slowly through the lemon. The lemon juice runs over your fingers as the knife blade slices through. Now slowly bring the lemon slice up to your lips. What happens? Your mind thinks lemon slice and your mouth begins to water!

This is an example of the mind-body concept of information transduction, which proposes that words or images in the mind can be converted into physical changes in the body. Similarly, the concept of ideomotor action observes that thoughts can lead to physical action in the body. Simply stated, when we imagine something happening in our bodies it is processed in the same neural substrate as if it were actually taking place. That's why going to a peaceful place in imagination or stopping negative thoughts can create a more peaceful and sometimes even a less painful feeling in the body.

These two mechanisms—ideomotor action and information transduction—are at the heart of many mind-body techniques, including guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and the famous relaxation response developed in the 1970s by Dr. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School and Boston's Mind Body Institute. Benson developed his therapy following his groundbreaking study of the effect of transcendental meditation (TM) on relaxation. In a recent interview on public radio, he reported that he has combed the world's spiritual literature and has found these techniques embedded in the rituals of all major religions and in prayer.

With that background, you may feel ready to learn more.

Now here are three simple things you can try as you explore mind-body approaches to managing pain and its accompanying negative emotions.

Tip 1: Use the relaxation response to stop the emotional amplifiers of pain.

We know that pain creates a stress reaction in the body and generates negative emotions of anger, sadness, and fear. These negative emotions become embodied in physical sensations and can amplify the experience of pain. Anger and resentment form in the neck and shoulders, sadness forms in the area around our heart, and fear and worry become felt as real in the stomach area.

In our Pain Management Program, we use automatic unconscious processes to quickly eliminate these emotions so that they don't have a chance to amplify pain.

You can try using the relaxation response to get a similar effect.

By stopping worried thinking or holding a pleasant mental image, you can unhook thoughts from feelings and create this response. Dr. Benson recommends that you choose an image of a peaceful place, such as a lake or ocean, or a word or phrase that has special meaning for you, like *love* or *I am relaxing*, to focus on. You can also combine sounds and images. Use your imagination, literally!

Dr. Benson and his colleagues at the Mind Body Institute found that the relaxation response is very useful in healing several stress-related ailments, including anxiety. And by stopping the emotional amplifiers of pain, this simple technique can even lead to some pain reduction.

Here are the simple steps:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.

3. Now with each breath, slowly repeat your chosen word, sound, prayer, or phrase, or imagine gazing at your chosen image.
4. Just notice what you're experiencing. When other thoughts come to mind, gently return to the thought-stopping repetition of your chosen focus.
5. Be patient and continue for ten to twenty minutes.
6. Repeat several times a day. The results add up with practice.

Tip 2:

Expand your phenomenal field to lessen the emotional impact of pain.

The negative emotions that accompany chronic pain evolved to give us a feeling of discomfort and send a visceral message to take action to do something to relieve the discomfort. While serving their purpose, these emotions also end up limiting our coping skills by narrowing what's known as our phenomenal field. To understand why this is, consider two different evolutionary scenarios.

Here's the scene: Imagine yourself several million years ago, about four feet tall, poking around for something to eat in the heartland of your ancestral home, the grassy fields of Africa. Your ears pick up the sound of rustling in the grass. Slowly you watch the head of a saber-toothed tiger rise to meet your gaze.

Scenario number 1: You say to yourself, Cool! That cat must weigh six hundred pounds! Look at all the pretty colors in the fur. And look at those lovely yellow eyes. And what big teeth you have!

Scenario number 2: Immediately, filters come up in your perception. Everything in your peripheral vision vanishes. It's as if you're looking through perceptual blinders now with only one thing on your mind—survival. Your eyes widen as you take in loads of visual information necessary for your survival. Before you even have a thought, your body is automatically running at full speed.

So, which scenario works best? If you picked scenario number 1, you would most likely not be reading this page because your ancestors would have been somebody's breakfast!

Obviously, the second scenario is the adaptive solution—one truly helpful in an emergency. Now, millions of years later, we're still wired with these same mechanisms. Unfortunately, this age-old adaptive perceptual strategy of narrowing our phenomenal field when we're threatened actually limits our coping skills.

Think of it this way: When you're relaxed and peaceful it's as if you have all

eighty-eight keys on your piano to play life's music. Chronic pain narrows the size of perception. Pain generates a stress response that turns your perceptual keyboard into a toy piano with a limited repertoire—few tunes to play and in a narrow range.

Consider what happens to a problem the size of an orange when viewed on a television screen only six inches wide. The problem fills up the entire screen. There's almost nothing else to see. When you're relaxed and comfortable, the screen size increases. The same size problem on a screen six feet wide becomes relatively smaller.

This narrowing of the phenomenal field is the neurological mechanism behind what cognitive behavioral psychologists call catastrophising—and it's a common finding in chronic pain patients.

- * Do you feel edgy and irritable?
- * Is your patience short or shot?
- * Do you have problems concentrating?
- * Do you feel like your thinking is black and white instead of a million shades of gray?

You can thank Mother Nature for this fight-flight mechanism, which in today's world actually limits your coping ability and can *increase* the pain response.

Now, there are literally *hundreds* of exercises to expand your phenomenal field. You can find one extensive set of great exercises in the neat book *Out of the Box for Life*, a quick read that we heartily recommend.

Here's one of our own that's used in an eight-week pain management program we developed for hospitals and pain clinics.

1. Rate how much you like yourself right now on a 0-to-10 scale. Remember the number.
2. Find something you're worrying about and rate it also on a 0-to-10 scale, where 0 is "Poof! What's the trouble with trouble?" and 10 is "I am out of mind with worry." Remember the number and how it feels in your neck and shoulders, heart space, and in your gut.
3. Imagine yourself at the height of your game, a time when you felt flushed with confidence and power. Float down into this image and really let your mind and body fill with this experience. You can also pick something you desire, something so wonderful and yummy that you want even more of it. Let this feeling wash through you as desire and appetite for *more and more*.
4. Now again rate how much you like yourself and how the problem feels. Your liking probably went up and the significance of the problem may just have gone down.

Stay tuned for more insights and techniques from the **Insider's Guide to Mind-Body Medicine**. And please be sure to contact us with your experiences.

We're happy to talk with you at no charge to answer your questions and explore how NeuroBehavioral Programs can help you. Complete the contact form at www.bepainfree.net or call us at 888-688-8956.