

Summit Press

Hypnosis for Moving Through Illness

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Managing Pain

We've all felt varying degrees and types of pain in our lives. From broken bones to sprains to headaches to childbirth, pain comes in many forms and has many origins. Probably the only two things all types of pain have in common is that they're unpleasant for the average person, and they're associated with damage to the body from either the outside or the inside. There are advantages to pain, in that it can be your incentive to remove yourself from a dangerous or damaging situation. But generally, pain isn't something most people invite into their lives or want in their lives.

There are two main types of pain: acute and chronic. Let me first explain what each type of pain means and who might experience it.

Acute

Acute pain is a signal. It tells you that *something is wrong right now and you'd better attend to it, or else!* It usually motivates you to seek out some kind of medical help. In that sense, acute pain, as uncomfortable or even excruciating as it may be, is actually beneficial. Furthermore, acute pain has a clear, identifiable cause. That cause, once identified, can be treated, thereby lessening the pain at the root (rather than just muting the pain with pain medication, although in some cases that is all that *can* be done). Some examples of acute pain are caused by: acute appendicitis, bone fractures, muscle sprains and heart attacks. Acute pain is generally defined as lasting up to 30 days. Chronic

Chronic pain starts as an acute pain and then continues beyond the normal time expected for resolution of the problem. It is also often defined as pain that lasts more than six months. Unlike acute pain, which alerts you to the fact that something is wrong or damaged and needs to be attended to, chronic pain isn't therapeutically beneficial. Where the focus is on identifying and treating the cause of acute pain, the focus is on reducing and managing chronic pain so that permanent damage or disability doesn't result, and functioning is as good as it can be considering whatever is wrong or damaged.

When I say “whatever is wrong or damaged,” I’m referring to tissue damage, nerve damage, disruptions in blood supply that cause tightness and oppression, phantom limb pain, as well as pain from treatments for any of these.

Pain management is by no means a one-size-fits-all challenge. Everyone experiences pain differently and some people suffer far more pain than others. The reason? Well, it’s more like *reasons*. Heredity, fear, the level of stress you’re experiencing, your emotional state, whether you are currently experiencing or have the propensity toward clinical depression, and then there are your past experiences of pain that you carry around. There are also your individual amounts of neurotransmitters, which essentially act as pain-killers or pain producers.

Another part of the challenge of pain is that it doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s part of a cycle:

- pain
- anxiety about the pain
- fatigue from the anxiety as well as fatigue from the pain
- depression due to the pain, the anxiety, and the fatigue

People in constant pain often—and understandably—feel helpless and irritable. Their cognitive abilities become impaired, their decision-making is affected, they have trouble sleeping, and their social lives often suffer. Pain can be so debilitating to so many aspects of your life because it lives in the brain and the brain is the command center for every aspect of your life. And brain imagery has showed us that there isn’t just one part of your brain that’s involved with pain—there are several.

Pain is affected by your emotions and affects your emotions. It is influenced by expectations and it influences them. Your thoughts and emotions can become driven by pain. But the good news is that they can also drive pain—away. And though there are competing theories on exactly how pain is produced, everyone agrees that it originates in the brain, and we can retrain your brain through hypnosis.

Hypnosis and Pain Management

Hypnosis has been found to reduce the intensity of pain (Dahlgren et al., 1995). It has also been shown to be more effective than medication (prochlorperazine/Stemetil) in treating migraines (Anderson, Basker, & Dalton, 1975), and superior to standard treatment in pain control of bone marrow transplantation patients (Syriala, Cummings, & Donaldson, 1992). It has been used successfully to manage the pain resulting from severe burns (Patterson, Goldberg, & Ehde, 1996); it has a reliable and significant impact on both acute pain related to procedures, and chronic pain (Patterson & Jensen, 2003); and it has been successfully treating pain in cancer patients of all kinds and at all stages, for years (Spira & Spiegel, 1992).

As I explained earlier in this book, the attitude you adopt is very important for hypnosis in general, but particularly so for patients experiencing chronic pain. Usually, by the time someone comes to

see me, they've been through attempts of all different kinds to manage their pain and all have failed. Many have a very negative attitude because of these prior failures. However, pain management is one of the most studied uses for hypnosis, and the evidence that exists, in my experience, easily changes the attitude of skeptics. I'm happy to refer patients to some of the studies I referenced so they can read for themselves how successful hypnosis has been when it comes to pain management. In fact, reading the research primes them for success during our sessions.

Pain Management on the Conscious Level

There are a number of things you can do on the conscious level to alleviate feelings of pain, and you can use them in conjunction with hypnosis for your subconscious. Some of them are:

- *Visualize someone you love.* Viewing pictures of a romantic partner has been shown to reduce pain (Younger et al., 2010).
- *Distract yourself.* You can distract yourself from pain for hours. Yes, hours is temporary, but for some people it's the difference between being able to function and being incapacitated by the pain. Go to a movie, get involved in a project around the house, do a puzzle, do anything that keeps your mind occupied, as your mind is what keeps telling you you're in pain.
- *Exercise.* The natural endorphins your brain releases that improve your mood and are responsible for the famous "runner's high," block pain signals and have myriad other benefits. Whatever level of exercise you are capable of will help. Exercise also has the added benefit of strengthening muscles, which makes certain injuries less likely.
- *Get a massage.* Massages can help reduce stress, and stress increases pain.
- *Cut out nicotine and alcohol.* Smoking can exacerbate existing problems with circulation, and of course it increases the risk of cancer and heart disease. As for alcohol, as I mentioned in *Optimal Sleep*, it interrupts sleep. And when sleep is interrupted, exhaustion results, as does stress, which, as I frequently repeat, increases pain. The domino effect of alcohol consumption can't be overstated.

Breathe through the pain. There are many techniques you can use on the conscious level that involve the breath. One is to inhale deeply and send that healing breath to the place of pain and visualize it cleaning out that place or maybe shattering an image of the pain. And then exhale all of the pieces. Combining the breath with visualization is a powerful tool for pain reduction. What color is your pain? What does it look like? Is it a monster, is it a pulsing spot, is it the anatomical image of the spot injured? What does a nice clean breath look like when you inhale it and what does it look like as it travels through you to the place of pain? And what happens when your breath conquers the pain? What does the clearing out process look like on the exhale? Use all of these images and clean out, pulverize, or otherwise destroy your pain with your powerful, healing breath.

- *Speak positively about your condition.* If you go around talking about how exhausted you are and how much pain you're in and how the pain seems to never stop, guess what? You are

hypnotizing yourself. Remember that the words you constantly repeat to yourself and others contribute to the creation of your life, and that includes the amount of pain in your life.

- *Meditate.* There are many ways to meditate and distract your mind from the pain. One is to count in-and-out breaths up to 10 (slow, deep breaths), while sitting still in a quiet place. You'll be amazed at how you have to concentrate on the numbers. There are only 10, yet the practice of breathing correctly and thinking only about the breath and the number is remarkably *not* easy. This occupies your mind and of course has the benefit of bringing large amounts of healing oxygen to your brain. Don't be surprised if you get light-headed.
- *Laugh.* What's your favorite film that's a comedy? Go online and spend \$2 to watch it if you don't have it at home. This distracts you from the pain and has the added benefit of healing laughter. Laughter relaxes the body, boosts the immune system, releases endorphins (improves mood) and protects the heart as it increases blood flow, which helps guard against all manner of cardiovascular problems. Laughter has even been found to increase pain thresholds (Dunbar et al., 2011). *Write a pain management plan.* This isn't the plan your doctors put together for you that includes your medication, massages, biofeedback, and whatever else might alleviate your pain. This is about the specific circumstances or times of day or environments where your pain peaks. Know what those conditions are, and Plan A is always to avoid them, if possible. But if it's not possible, begin your deep breathing beforehand, visualize the person you love, relax your mind and body, create an affirmation around the situation, and approach your trigger conditions primed for relaxation and impervious to peak pain.

My Training in Pain Management

The hypnosis technique I'm trained in was developed by Ron Eslinger, who has been called the "Captain of Pain" (management). The Captain part comes from his service as a Captain in the US Navy, where he was a certified nurse anesthetist (CRNA). He is known best for using hypnosis to manage pain and he developed a series of suggestions designed to relax the mind and body, relieve them of pain, and stop the pain cycle. I've incorporated his best practices into the following script, which I encourage you to use at least once a day.

There are also more sophisticated hypnosis techniques for dealing with pain, and hypnotists who have been trained in pain management are likely to know how to do them. My favorite one is called Glove Anesthesia, and it involves numbing your hand through hypnosis and then moving that numb hand to wherever you are feeling pain. The sensation is like the delivery of instant anesthesia to the site of the pain. If you are experiencing pain and you are interested in finding a hypnotist you can go to locally, make sure to ask what kinds of techniques they use and if they're trained in pain management.

Managing Pain

Instructions:

1. Read each night, before retiring, for 21 nights. Read aloud, with feeling, using the word you chose earlier to replace the longer version of Alpha Conditioning.
2. Proceed immediately to the script for Managing Pain.

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From this moment on, each and every time I desire to attain the deep state of total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed, as I am now drifting into the Alpha state of consciousness. The moment I think my chosen word, ___, Alpha occurs. This word has an effect only when I use it and only under the proper circumstances. Each and every time I do use it I am fully prepared to receive positive, beneficial, and constructive suggestions, impressing each one deeper into the storage and memory facility of my brain.

From this moment on, _____ triggers deep relaxation of my mind and body. I feel Alpha occur. I feel wonderful. I feel comfortable. I am totally receptive and responsive to my own creative ideas and suggestions. I am bathed in a glow of quietness, peace, and serenity. My chosen word works only when I deliberately use it for deep relaxation to attain Alpha consciousness. Its use in regular conversation has no effect on me whatsoever. From this moment on, each and every time I desire the deep state of total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed upon saying ___. Because my subconscious must follow my command, each and every time I desire total relaxation, I am instantly and fully relaxed when I think my chosen word ___. I feel a deep sense of gratification as this word programming becomes a reality. Feeling wonderful, generous, alive, and eager to manage my pain.

MANAGING PAIN

I am now so very profoundly relaxed . . . that everything that I tell myself . . . that is going to happen to me . . . for my own good . . . will happen . . . exactly as I tell myself. And every feeling . . . that I tell myself that I will experience . . . I will experience . . . I will experience . . . exactly as I tell myself. And these same things will continue to happen to me . . . every day . . . and I will continue to experience these same feelings . . . every day . . . just as strongly . . . just as surely . . . just as powerfully .

. . . when I am home . . . or anywhere else . . . as when I am listening to my voice right now.

As a result of this profound hypnotic experience . . . I am going to feel physically stronger and fitter in every way. I already feel more alert . . .

. . . more wide awake . . . more energetic. I am much less easily tired . . . much less easily fatigued . . . much less easily discouraged . . . much less easily depressed. Every day . . . I become so deeply interested in whatever I am doing . . . that I no longer dwell upon myself and my difficulties .

. . . and I become much less conscious of myself . . . much less preoccupied with myself and about how others might feel about me. Every day my nerves become stronger and steadier . . . my mind calmer and clearer .

. . . more composed . . . more placid . . . more tranquil. I become much less easily worried . . . much less easily agitated . . . much less fearful and apprehensive . . . much less easily upset.

I am able to think more clearly . . . I am able to concentrate more easily. I am able to give my whole, undivided attention to whatever I am doing

. . . to the complete exclusion of everything else. Consequently . . . my memory rapidly improves . . . and I see things in their true perspective . .

. . . without magnifying them . . . without ever allowing them to get out of proportion . . . every day . .

. . . I am emotionally much calmer . . . much more settled . . . much less easily disturbed every day . .

. . . I am . . . and I will remain . . . more and more completely relaxed . . . and less tense each day . .

. . . both mentally and physically . . . even when I am no longer

reading this. And as I become . . . and as I remain . . . more relaxed . . . and less tense each day . . . so I develop much more confidence in myself

. . . more confidence in my ability to do . . . not only what I have to do each day . . . but more confidence in my ability to do whatever I ought to be able to do . . . without fear of failure . . . without unnecessary fear of consequences . . . without unnecessary anxiety . . . without uneasiness.

Because of this . . . every day . . . I feel more and more independent, more able to stick up for myself . . . to stand upon my own feet . . . to hold my own . . . no matter how difficult things may be.

Every day . . . I feel a greater feeling of personal well-being . . . a greater feeling of personal safety . .

. . . and security . . . than I have felt for a long, long, time. And because all of these things happen . .

. . . exactly as I tell myself that they do . . . more and more rapidly . . . powerfully . . . and completely . . . I feel much happier . . . much more contented . . . much more optimistic in every way. I consequently become much more able to

. . . rely upon and depend upon . . . myself . . . my own efforts . . . my own judgment . . . my own opinions . . . I feel . . . much less need . . . to have to rely upon . . . or to depend upon . . . other people.

I want to control the pain in my body that I have been experiencing. I have made a decision to take back control of a part of my life that has been out of control for too long. I have made the decision to control the pain that I have been experiencing. That's right! Great.

Now, I settle even deeper into a more relaxed state. I am so comfortable and at ease. I focus on my breathing. I focus on inhaling a nice deep breath . . . now I exhale that deep breath. Good. Now, with each breath that I exhale, the relaxation I am feeling spreads even further throughout my body. Very good. And now, I focus on the part of my body where I am experiencing pain. Focus on that part of my body right this moment . . . actually visualize the pain. Picture the pain and the discomfort that I am feeling. Good . . . now, I see the pain that I am feeling as the color red. That's right. I picture the pain in my body as the color red. Now, I focus only on the color red. I am going to make the color red fade away. The red is becoming even lighter now, and it is no longer a cherry red. The color is fading and becoming even lighter. The color I see is more of a light red . . . and now the color I am visualizing is pink . . . the color pink continues to fade . . . fade away. Now, the color that I see is a very, very faint shade of pink, and it turns so light that I see no more color! Great!! My pain, like the color red, has reduced!

Pain is a warning device from my body. My pain serves a very important natural function: it tells my body when something is not right. It is my own personal protection system. At this point, however, my body is fully aware of its problems and I do not need pain flaring up to remind me of that fact. I know the problem is there, and I am working to correct it.

If I need to know about a change in the area where I've been hurting, if I need to be warned, from this point forward I will feel a tingling in the area instead of pain. I will then be able to see that any new problem is taken care of as soon as possible. My warning system has not been taken away; it has been improved so that I will no longer need to feel pain like I have been. I no longer feel severe pain connected with my specific problem, but this in no way alters my warning signals for any other reason.

I will now imagine that I am concentrating a healing light in the area where I desire the pain to go away and stay away. I direct this healing light, which in my imagination can be any color, any shade, directly at the area where I have felt the worst pain.

I set up rapid and instantaneous healing with the healing light. I feel all tension leaving the area. All pain is completely gone from the area. I feel soothed, relaxed and pain free. It is as though the entire area has been anesthetized without taking away any motor response whatsoever. I have complete muscle and motor response, but the area has no pain. The healing light has taken the pain away.

I feel my body being healed as the wonderful energy current moves into each area of my body that desires loving and healing attention. Now I feel changes occurring as I allow my body to let go of physiological responses that are inappropriate to my overall wellness.

I now feel a beautiful glow moving into the newly healed areas, filling these areas with love and light as it seeps through all my muscles, organs, tissues, and cells. I allow these parts of my body to

develop new reactions, new responses, new ways of being, so that they operate harmoniously with all other systems of my body.

Now I feel my mind being healed as I share more and more secrets about myself with me . . . coming clean, taking responsibility, loving myself, and freeing myself.

My body is feeling better and better now, as I imagine that crystal clear, bubbly water is now being inhaled all the way up into my hips, and through all of my organs, producing an ideal state of relaxation.

I now change the liquid into a magic pleasure potion and imagine that it is being ideally absorbed by my entire body, mind and spirit. That's right, I allow my body to absorb this magical, healing pleasure potion and I know that its euphoric, healing effects will start to work immediately and will continue to blossom and bloom inside me for as long as it is safe and helpful.

I allow the pleasure potion to pulsate and to become ideally absorbed inside me . . . especially in the parts of my body and mind that require loving and healing attention. I let the magic, healing, pleasure potion reach into every cell, vessel, fiber, organ, nerve, muscle, joint, ligament, gland, node, and every other part of me so I may achieve an ideal level of health, comfort, and pleasure.

As the magical pleasure potion floats inside me, I allow it to automatically adjust my serotonin levels . . . as the magic pleasure potion flows freely through me . . . I allow it to ideally release a helpful flow of endorphins inside me that will enable me to feel really . . . really . . . good . . . and incredibly euphoric.

As the magic pleasure potion dances joyously in my system and begins the process of releasing the helpful flow of endorphins, I imagine there is a dimmer switch inside me that enables me to release the proper amount of endorphins and other feel-good chemicals and hormones into my system. That's right, I get in touch with where that switch is located, and I go mentally inside myself and slowly adjust it so I achieve helpful and desired chemical and hormonal balance . . . and a pleasurable and euphoric state of body and mind.

For added security, I now surround myself with a bubble of protective white light. As I surround myself with this protective bubble, I know that it will prevent inappropriate energies from entering into my system. That's right . . . this bubble of white light will now serve as a silent guard . . . protecting me from negative thoughts and outside energies, always.

As I sit or lie here, every second I become more relaxed . . . more calm . . . more tranquil. I think of the color blue because blue represents peace and serenity. It also represents the good flow of communication within the body. Every time I think of the color blue in any form real or imagined, my body feels strong . . . healthy and free from pain. The pain-relieving neurons in my body are working and communicating the calm, peaceful, pain-free state I am in. Blue is my passport to vitality and strength. Any time I see the color blue, in and out of

my conscious awareness, it automatically doubles this entire session for freedom from pain in my subconscious mind.

You now have the choice to either awaken or to drift off into a normal, natural sleep. If you are going to awaken, say:

Twenty minutes. Wide awake.

If you are going to drift off into a normal, natural sleep, say:

I am now going to drift off into a normal, natural sleep. When I awaken, I will feel fully rested, calm, and at peace with myself, the world, and those around me.