

Healing and Pain Management

Introduction

Healing and pain management may not mean cure, but you can learn how to handle your pain or illness more effectively and improve the quality of your life. Please experiment with the following ideas in conjunction with any medical advice and treatment you are receiving.

Emotional

Create a solid, social, support network so you can share your feelings with someone supportive. Write out your feelings or use a creative avenue such as painting or creative writing.

Accept that this pain/illness is what you are experiencing. Denying and resisting will only exacerbate symptoms. Develop an attitude of self-acceptance and self-compassion.

Develop a list of activities that soothe you when you are feeling down, experiencing pain or feeling unwell, for example, have a bath or watch a funny film. List the things you do well and that you enjoy and do one!

Practical

Set realistic goals for the important areas of your life. Think of long term goals and then short-term goals or steps that will help you achieve your long term goals.

Pace yourself daily by making realistic and achievable goals. Make a back-up plan in case you have a pain flare up or you become unwell. Work smarter not harder, that is, accommodate your pain or illness by making changes to your day or the tasks you need to complete. For example, give yourself breaks. Organise your work or study space so you know where everything is.

Keep a pain diary and work out what factors and situations exacerbate your symptoms. Learn what your time limits are for different activities, so you stop or change activities before the pain increases.

Take time to think about your life as a whole and whether there are particular areas that are causing you stress and therefore impact on how you manage your symptoms. Give yourself time to work out some options for changing these additional stressors. Talking to a Counsellor may be beneficial.

Find pleasant ways to stimulate your other senses – sight, sound, smell and touch - such as listening to music, aromatherapy, massage or looking at a beautiful picture book.

Cognitive

Become aware of your beliefs around pain and illness and more specifically your self-talk. What do you say to yourself about your pain or illness? What are the 'shoulds', 'can'ts' 'always' in your self-talk?

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Identify how you think in a negative or unhelpful way to yourself and change it to helpful and realistic thinking. For example, 'I can't cope – there is nothing I can do' could be changed to 'I have coped in the past when I've slowed down and not pushed myself so hard'.

Find inspiring quotes and keep them accessible to read silently or out loud, or write them out and place them around the house where you will see them.

Physical

Find an exercise regime that is appropriate for you. Keep regular sleeping hours with the amount of hours that you need and have a nutritionally balanced diet so you take in the necessary nutrients for the care and repair of your body. Consult a dietician if necessary.

Be involved in the different areas of your life whether it be work, study, social activities, hobbies. Being absorbed in activities can distract you from your distressing symptoms.

Practise relaxation or meditation regularly so when pain strikes you know how to calm your body and avoid muscle tension which increases the pain and exacerbates your symptoms.

Spiritual

Think about the ways you can find beauty or something pleasurable in your life such as listening to your favourite music, appreciating the natural environment or the pleasure in looking after a pet.

If you have spiritual or religious beliefs, give yourself time daily for a particular devotional practice such as prayer or meditation.

Acknowledge your strengths, such as your courage and determination. Think about what gives meaning and value to your life. What are your priorities? Does this pain/illness lead you to make significant changes so you can focus on your priorities and maybe let go of what is less important?

Conclusion

These strategies are ideas to try out and see what works for you. If you would like help and guidance, make a time to talk to a counsellor or to your doctor. The Healing and Pain Management audio recording, available from UNE Student Assist, has three meditations/relaxation sequences that are beneficial in dealing with pain and illness.

For further information contact the UNE Counsellors at:

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