



Be Pain Smart – Pain

Pain thought swaps

Swapping unhelpful thoughts about your pain for helpful ones can aid you with managing your pain and meet your goals. Remember, your thoughts, feelings and actions are linked, so the way you think about your pain is important.

Thoughts are often categorised as positive or negative, but it is more useful to think about thoughts as helpful or unhelpful. Helpful thoughts allow you to deal with your problems and meet your goals. Unhelpful thoughts make you feel worse and can lead you further away from your goals.

Lots of people with chronic pain also start to feel down and depressed. This can lead to doing less over time, which makes pain worse. When you are down, your thoughts might focus on all the bad things, such as how unfair life is and that everything is hopeless. Lots of people think that because they are not happy with how things are right now, the future will be worse.

It can be hard to find helpful thoughts when you are in pain. There is no point denying that you are in pain, but there is a more helpful way to think about it.

‘Yes, I am in pain, but the best way for me to deal with this is to stay calm, stop getting stressed and remember that the pain will pass. I have dealt with this pain before and I will be okay.’

This is more helpful than becoming distressed or angry, thinking the pain will never go away, or thinking that the pain is worse than ever and that you cannot cope.

What kind of thinking would you prefer?

Sometimes it is hard to stop those unhelpful thoughts, but it can be easier to swap these for more helpful thoughts.

Let's look at some examples below.

In the first column, there are some common unhelpful thoughts you might have about your pain and depression. These are thoughts that other people in chronic pain have said that they have – are these thoughts familiar to you?



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Next to these are some more helpful thoughts – you can call these **thought swaps**. These are thoughts that you can swap for your unhelpful thoughts about your pain.

Read through the different thoughts below to see which ones work for you.

UNHELPFUL THOUGHT		THOUGHT SWAP
<i>My pain is worse, it will never go away.</i>		<i>I know I cannot make my pain go away entirely, but I can cope with this.</i>
<i>The pain is so bad, it feels like I will be stuck like this forever.</i>		<i>Even when my pain gets bad, I know it will not stay like this forever.</i>
<i>When the pain is so bad, it makes me feel so stressed and angry.</i>		<i>I will try to keep myself as calm as possible.</i>
<i>I do not want to do anything when I am in pain.</i>		<i>I do not feel like doing anything, but if I do it anyway, I may feel better than if I do nothing.</i>
<i>The pain controls me, I am powerless.</i>		<i>There are many things I can do to help myself to manage the pain as best I can (exercise, pacing, relaxation).</i>
<i>I cannot accept the pain.</i>		<i>I do not want to accept it, but this is how it is. I accept that this is how it is for the time being, now I can try to get on with my life in a healthy way.</i>



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Now, it is your turn to create your own **thought swaps**. They work better when they are personal to you. Take a moment to think of one of your common thoughts about your pain. Write the thought below...

My unhelpful thought about pain...

Now think of a new, more helpful thought to swap with the old one.

My new, more helpful thought...



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Keep going with making more **thought swaps** about your pain.

Write your unhelpful thoughts in the first column and then make a new, more helpful thought to swap it with.

UNHELPFUL THOUGHT	THOUGHT SWAP
	
	
	
	