



Acceptance and Normalizing Pain

“Acceptance doesn’t mean resignation. It means understanding that something is what it is and that there has to be a way through it.” -- Michael J. Fox

“Acceptance in chronic pain and conditions is: Accepting the body that you have right now and working with it. Do not compare yourself to who you were because your body has changed and you need to change with it. Once you accept this, your life will open up to possibilities.” -- Gwenn Herman, LCSW, DCSW

Normalizing pain is understanding and accepting yourself as you are today.

- *Need to set realistic expectations of ourselves.*
- *This includes asking for help.*
- *Have a flexible plan for your day/week.*
- *Validate your feelings - you are not alone.*

(Ideas from Making the Invisible Visible: Chronic Pain Manual for Health Care Providers by Gwenn Herman and Mary French, pages 113-114, 218-220.)

Accept Your Pain; It Will Hurt Less

Psychology Today by Leslie Becker-Phelps PhD *(Excerpt from Article)*

- Accepting reality leads to change like denial never can.

Begin by accepting your current reality. Your situation is what it is. No amount of wishing for something different or rejecting the situation (or yourself) will change anything. However, by facing your problem, you can at least begin to address it.

Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and desires. Only by knowing your inner experiences can you be true to them. When they are painful, you can then at least find ways to comfort yourself and cope as effectively as possible with them.

Choose to be accepting and compassionate to your experiences. No one ever healed from a blow to the head by hitting themselves there again. The same can be said of emotional pain; that is, self-criticism about some difficulty won’t resolve that problem. In both cases, the way to heal and move beyond the hurt is to accept it and find ways to nurture the wound. More specifically with psychological pain, acceptance and compassion are essential to heal and to free yourself and nurture greater personal growth.

Plan for a better future. If you are unhappy with some aspect of yourself or your circumstance, you would benefit from planning for the change you would like to see—even as you accept and nurture your current self.

The following is adapted from Jenni Grover's book, [Chronic Babe 101](#), © 2017 p. 20-29.

Acceptance examples: The notion of Yes, and....

“Yes I have fibromyalgia and I can still work part-time in my field.”

“Yes, I spent the whole day on the couch feeling sorry for myself, and it’s okay – tomorrow’s a new day.”

Practice and Perks

Acceptance is an ongoing pursuit, one to work on daily.

* You’ll find it gives you **energy** because you aren’t fighting your limitations. Instead you are thinking about them creatively.

* It gives you a **response to fear**. Hey, I’ve got this, I have options.

HOW?

Daily Writing Exercise: Find a journal/notebook and 10 minutes of uninterrupted time.

1. Start by writing down things you are really angry about for a few minutes. What’s a really frustrating challenge you have right now that you can’t change?

Ex. My new dental pain is limiting my ability to do my physical therapy exercises.

2. Now begin writing “acceptance answers” to these challenges. For ex. “I accept that pain is limiting my exercises and I have tools to manage it.” or “I accept that I have difficulty getting out in cold weather, and I will use the skills I have to minimize it.”

The key is NOT to write out how to fix it or eliminate it. - Accept it and acknowledge you will be okay anyway. You can add phrases like “It’s okay.” Also try not to judge your thoughts.

Daily Meditation is a second tool for practicing acceptance.

1. One way to do this is to create a mantra for your day. Ex. “I accept that I feel pain today and I will use my skills to minimize it.”
2. Find a comfortable space, set a 10 minute timer, and close your eyes. Breathe deep and exhale. Focus on your breath. Silently repeat a short mantra, such as “I accept that my pain is talking/screaming at me and I will practice self-care”, with some slow, deep breaths. As your mind wanders, gently return your attention to your breath and mantra. Open your eyes. Congrats! You just meditated on acceptance.

PERK: Acceptance makes it easier to be kind to yourself. Your body is not the enemy. It’s doing the best it can with the challenges it has.