

Attention Diversion for Chronic Pain

Whether or not you focus on your pain (or pay attention to it) has a lot to do with the amount of pain you experience or perceive. There are several things you should know about “attention”.

1. Attention is voluntary. This means that you are capable of directing your attention away from your pain.
2. You can only fully pay attention to one thing at a time. This means that if you focus your attention on your pain, your pain may seem much more intense than when you focus on your attention on something else.
3. You must actively shift your attention away from the pain. This means that unless you actively work to do so, it will be difficult (if not impossible) to shift your attention away from pain.

There are many ways to divert your attention away from your pain. Some chronic pain sufferers do best by getting involved in an activity (for example, doing household chores or going shopping). Engaging in an activity that is enjoyable and engaging will be the most effective attention diversion. With practice these interesting activities and mental distracters can become effective methods of attention diversion.

No matter what strategy you choose, directing your attention to something other than your pain is likely to help make the pain more bearable. But be patient. Pain is a strong, attention grabbing stimulus, therefore it will take some practice to develop your attention diversion skills. Similar to other pain management skills, even once you have developed the skill, your mind will still wander back to the pain. When this happens, just refocus on the activity you are trying to focus on.

On the next page is a list of mental activities that can be employed as attention diversion techniques.

**We are more sensible of one little touch of
the surgeon's lancet than of twenty wounds
with a sword in the heat of fight.**

Michel de Montaigne

Focusing your attention outside yourself

- ◇ Counting floor/ceiling tiles
- ◇ Examining the construction of a piece of furniture
- ◇ Counting the number of red cars that pass by

Focusing attention on a train of thought

- ◇ Planning a to-do list
- ◇ Remembering the words to a song or prayer
- ◇ Performing mental arithmetic
- ◇ Imagining what you'd do with \$1 million dollars
- ◇ Planning a dream vacation

Focusing on sensations in your body

Note: - this technique is especially good when pain becomes too intense to focus away from it.

- ◇ Analyze your pain in an objective manner like you were writing a biology paper about it.
- ◇ Compare in detail the sensations you are now feeling with what you've experienced in the past.

Write Below Which Type of Mental Activities You Want to Try This Week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____