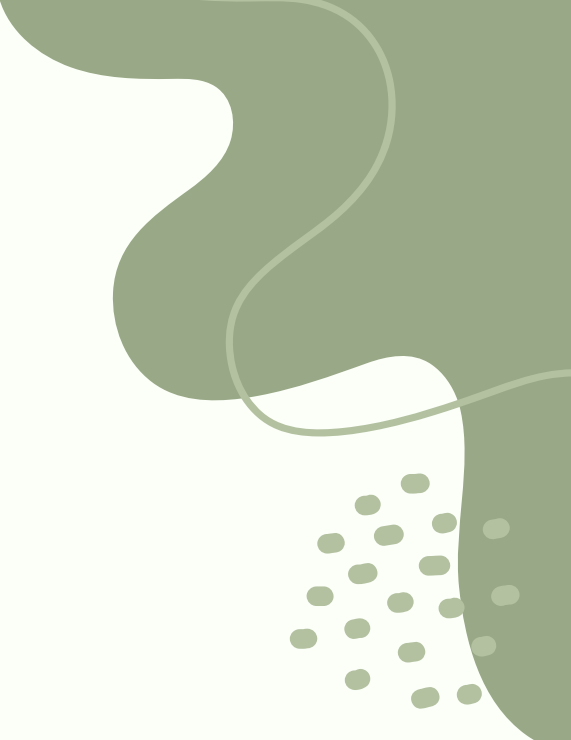




Your Guide to Managing Chronic Pain & Illness Flare Ups

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How can Therapy Help with Chronic Pain & Illness?

The mind-body connection is real, and in therapy, I see the mental and physical as one in the same. And no, this does *not* mean “the pain is all in your head.” Pain is a very complex phenomenon that not only lives in our body, but is very closely tied to our brain and our emotions. This isn’t an entirely new concept- Have you ever been anxious and it turned into an upset stomach? Or how about getting a headache from feeling stressed?

Pain is not only a medical problem, it is a *Bio-Psycho-Social* problem, meaning that our psychology, environment, and past experiences affect our perception of pain. And while a medical workup is essential, many people with chronic pain & illness do not find long-term relief through medicine *alone*. The brain science proves this: pain filters through the part of the brain called the *Limbic System*, which is the same place where emotions connect through. This is where therapy comes in.

Through therapy, a safe space is cultivated to truly learn how to feel and process the emotions and pain symptoms in a healthy way. This might look like:

- Learning how to communicate your emotions and set boundaries
- Processing and working through past traumas that kept you hypervigilant
- Showing up more authentically and live a life more aligned to your values
- “Befriending” the pain and trying to find out what it is trying to tell you
- Learning practical coping tools for grounding and stress-management

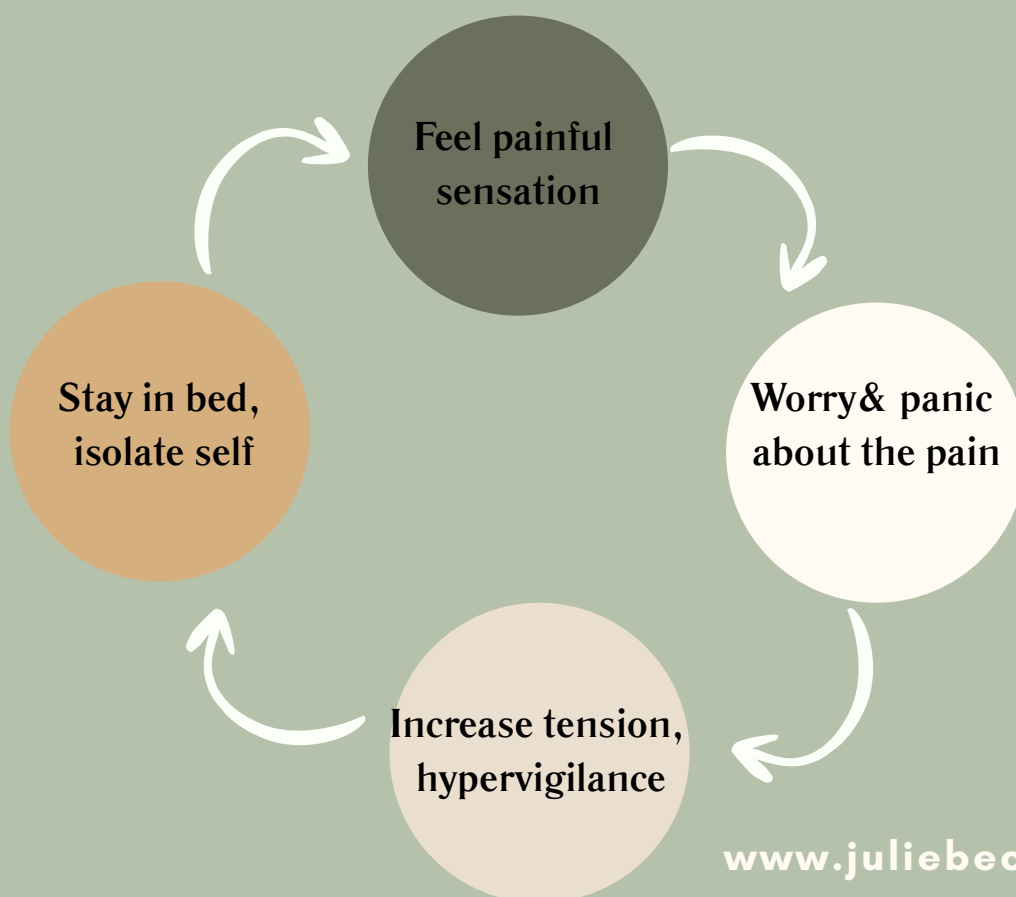
Through these methods, I have seen clients experience fewer health symptoms and less pain. (Of course, in conjunction with appropriate medical care under a physician.)

I too have suffered through years of chronic pain and illness; I have worked hard to get to the other side of healing, and I believe you can too.

Understanding the Fear-Pain Cycle

What is the Fear-Pain Cycle?

Studies show that there is a distinction between the sensation of the pain itself, and the *suffering* that occurs when our brains interpret pain as dangerous. You may notice a cycle that begins when the pain (or other somatic sensation) shows up, triggering a fear response that causes panic, dread, or anxiety. In turn, this leads to an increase in body tension, inflammatory stress response, and avoidant behaviors such as isolation. Afterwards, the pain often becomes more intense, leading to this pattern repeating itself all over again. It can look different for everyone, so learning about your individual fear-pain cycle is the first step to healing.



How to *not panic* when chronic symptoms flare up

Instead of *panicking*

-  “Oh no, my symptoms are coming back!”
-  “I don’t need to react to my symptoms immediately”

Instead of *catasrophizing*

-  “What if I never recover?”
-  “I thank my fear for trying to protect me, but I no longer need to respond to every worst case scenario”

Instead of *self-blame*

-  “It must be my fault”
-  “I allow my symptoms to be present without adding unhelpful interpretations to them”

Instead of *mental reviewing*

-  “What did I do wrong to deserve this?”
-  “I can accept that my symptoms come and go. This too shall pass.”

Affirmations for **CHRONIC PAIN**

I choose to relax and trust my body to handle this.

This is uncomfortable, not dangerous.

I give myself permission to take breaks and care for my mental health.

I am strong and capable of handling whatever comes my way.

I thank my fear for trying to protect me, and choose to let it go.

I have felt this before and will survive it again.

It is safe to be present in my body.

I allow my symptoms to be present without panicking.

BUILDING A PAIN TOOLBOX

Now that we are aware of our fear-pain cycle, and the role of emotions in the processing of pain, the next step is to build a coping plan for when symptoms arise. Again, this might look different for each individual, but here are some ideas that help many of my clients:

Grounding tools

- **Paced breathing** : inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 8. Repeat for 3 minutes
- **5 senses**: Notice how you experience each of the senses. What do you see? Smell? Feel?
- **Temperature**: Changing your state through heat or cold exposure. Take a warm bath, use a heating pad, or splash cold water on your face

Action steps

- **Take one small step**: Find a small way you can take action by sitting outside, taking a shower, or get a glass of water
- **Connection**: When the urge is to hide away, instead try to move towards social connection. E.g. Try just texting one person back
- **Self care!!** Arguably the most important tools. Making sure your basic needs are being met such as: getting enough sleep, nutritious meals, drinking water, limiting social media, etc.

BEFRIENDING THE PAIN

I know for people with chronic pain & illness that the idea of “Befriending” the pain sounds ridiculous and even scary. After all, the symptoms have tortured you for so long, how could you possibly learn to practice compassion towards them?

The reality of pain (and all symptoms) is, that our *body is only trying to keep us safe from harm*. Pain developed through evolution to be an alarm system to make sure we seek help and get an injury taken care of. Seeing it as a protective mechanism is key to this process.

Since fighting against the pain is no longer helpful, are you willing to try something different?

How to “Befriend” the pain

- **Give the pain a name!** Naming it something like “Pain voice” helps to remove ourselves from the pain, and all the fear that comes with it
- **Sit with the pain:** Rather than fighting against it (which only makes it worse), spend a few moments noticing the pain without judgment
- **Be curious:** Ask the pain “What message are you trying to send me?”
- **Talk to it kindly:** Tell the pain voice “I know you’re trying to protect me, but we are safe now.”



WAS THIS HELPFUL?

For more information
on chronic pain &
illness

- Check out my website www.juliebecktherapy.org
 - Reach out to book an intro call: jbeck@tccmh.com
 - Follow me on instagram! [@juliebecktherapy](https://www.instagram.com/juliebecktherapy)
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