

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 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 your 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