

Kit Two

Accepting the Pain



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Step One: Accepting the Pain

The beginning for your journey from patient to person:

The American Chronic Pain Association has developed the concept of *Ten Steps From Patient To Person*. The ten steps are a means to provide you with an overview of what is involved if you are to become an active participant in your recovery. These steps are the basics of pain management.

However, pain management does not end on step ten, but rather is a life long journey of learning and discovery. The majority of the information useful in pain management is nothing more than good living skills. Skills that can be applied to daily living situations, whether or not you have pain. Perhaps your pain has given you at least one advantage in life—the ability to appreciate each new day as you live it to its fullest.

In future kits we will explore additional skills that are useful in managing daily life. For now, however, let us focus on the basics of pain management—the Ten Steps From Patient to Person.

The ACPA Ten Steps From Patient To Person

- Step One: Accept the Pain
- Step Two: Get Involved
- Step Three: Set Priorities
- Step Four: Set Realistic Goals
- Step Five: Know Your Basic Rights
- Step Six: Recognize Your Emotions
- Step Seven: Learn to Relax
- Step Eight: Exercise
- Step Nine: See the Total Picture
- Step Ten: Reach Out



Accepting the Pain:

The first step in making the transition from patient to person is accepting the pain. Accepting your pain must be accomplished before you can begin any of the other steps. But for many people new to chronic pain, acceptance may be confusing. Acceptance sounds more like giving up and giving in to the pain. You may think it means to lie down and do nothing at all. That is not what acceptance of the pain is about. Understanding, education, involvement and open-minded are what it takes to accept the pain. Perhaps Arthur Gordon best defines acceptance. . . .

Some people confuse acceptance with apathy, but there's all the difference in the world.

Apathy fails to distinguish between what can and what cannot be helped; acceptance makes that distinction.

Apathy paralyzes the will-to-action; acceptance frees it by relieving it of impossible burdens.

Accepting your pain simply means that you understand the situation and are willing to work toward a better way of life. Having chronic pain and suffering with chronic pain can be two completely different matters.

We fear what we do not understand. The best way to reduce your fear of what pain might present over time is to learn as much as possible about it. Knowledge is a powerful weapon against fear. There are many resources available to help you learn about your condition. Learning about your problem can eliminate some fears and allow you to move forward in the journey from patient to person. There is a resource list available to help you locate organization that focus on your particular problem at the end of this kit.

You and Your Pain

While pain will never be your friend, it does not have to be your enemy. It will become your companion. You need to nurture the relationship so that you can maintain as much control as possible. To help understand and accept your pain we have designed several exercises that might be helpful.

Choose at least one of the exercises below to look at your pain in terms other than suffering.

What is in a name?

Medical terms are often overwhelming and sound depressing. You may simply refer to your physical condition as “my pain.” Instead of always saying, “My pain is . . .” or, “When I do this my pain really . . .” try using a word other than PAIN. Why not give your pain a name like Charlie, Bud, Susie, Milo, whatever. Then when you are talking to your friends and family instead of saying, “I would like to do that, but my pain is really bad.” You could say, “I would really like to do that, but Charlie has other plans for me today.” Or, “Charlie is really acting up today. I think I need to stay home and take care of him.”

In addition to avoiding the word pain all the time, you somehow sound less like a “patient.” Replacing the word “pain” with a name can immediately take you out of a patient role. Friends and family will not cringe every time they hear you talk about your pain. Giving your pain a name is liberating and can unburden those near to you.

Write a letter to your pain

Why not tell your pain exactly what is on your mind. Take time to write a long letter to your pain, telling it exactly what you think. Tell it what you would like it to do. Tell it your plans for the future and how it will have to learn to cooperate. Allow yourself to be as open and honest as possible. No holds barred. You might be surprised how good it feels to tell your pain what you think.

And, to gain a deeper understanding of your pain, you might try giving your pain a voice and having it write a letter to you. What do you think your pain would say to you? How would it respond to your comments? You might be surprised by what ends up on the paper.

Dear Pain ,

If my pain had a voice it would say:

Draw your pain

What does your pain look like? How would you picture it if you had to draw it? This exercise might be useful in understanding your pain and, hopefully, moving toward acceptance.

- You will need paper large enough to trace your silhouette. Butcher paper works nicely.
- Crayons, felt tip markers, or water paints.
- Someone to trace your outline on the paper. But, do this exercise by yourself so you can express your true feelings.
- Music of your choice is optional.

Once you have a silhouette of yourself on the paper you can begin. Visualize what your pain looks like inside your body. Below are some questions that you might ask yourself as you begin this exercise.

- Is the pain in one particular part of your body?
- Are there outside forces being exerted on your body? If so, what kind?
- What color would you use to draw your pain? Why?
- What objects would best demonstrate your pain, i.e., hand saw, hammer, or a knife?
- Does your pain have a hiding place in your body where it sometimes goes? Where?
- Can you draw something that helps reduce the intensity or even make the pain subside for a while? Please place it on your drawing.
- Draw a clock on the side of your silhouette, indicating times of day your pain is at its worse and its best.

There are many more things you could include in your drawing. Allow yourself as much time as you need to complete it. You may even want to work on it over several days. Once you have completed your drawing, hang in on the back of a door that is easily accessible to you. Each time you experience a new symptom, put it on your drawing. You might be surprised that it is very similar to something already on your drawing.

This exercise is to help you in visualizing your pain. It may do nothing to reduce your pain, but you may gain a better understanding of what you experience. The ability to see things clearly may make acceptance easier. Perhaps this exercise will allow you to accept your pain as you move forward in the journey from patient to person.

We will leave you with a thought that has helped millions of people who struggle with acceptance.

*God, grant me the serenity to
accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can, and
the wisdom to know the difference.*

Reinhold Niebuhr

Remember, life is not lived in the black and white, but in all the colors fall in between. There will still be days when you are convinced that something can be done about your pain, and you would be willing to do nearly anything that sounded even half true. But remember, accepting the pain does not mean that you give up hope, it simply means that you are willing to live in the rainbow of colors which are between black (total pain) and white (no pain at all). I prefer a rainbow any day!