



# Learn About Chronic Pain

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Chronic pain is a complex problem with many variables. The traditional medical approach offers simplistic solutions. To solve any problem, you must first understand it in intricate detail. DOC (**D**irect your **O**wn **C**are) is a framework that breaks down chronic pain into basic parts. Once a person understands what aspects of pain apply to them, then they will have the ability to find their own solution.

The DOC program is organized around addressing the following variables:

- Education
- Sleep
- Stress management
- Medications
- Goal setting/vocational issues
- Physical conditioning/ rehabilitation
- Family dynamics

Modern medicine is somehow ignoring the data and has been focused on finding a structural problem to explain why someone hurts. It is both illogical and a dangerous way to think. If you step on hot pavement, there is not a structural issue. Your brain just interpreted the sensory input from your feet and signaled danger. You automatically step back and protect the skin on the bottom of your feet. Almost every sensation of discomfort is not caused by a structural abnormality but by your brain's interpretation of sensory input. All sensations count from every sensor and all are competing for attention.

The pain system is elegant, balanced and causes you to act in way that keeps you safe. Members of any species that ignore these signals, simply did not survive. There is a rare condition is that of being born without a pain system. It is called, "congenital indifference to pain." They do not survive more than 10-15 years because they cannot protect themselves and they die of infection.

Pain impulses begin with stimulation of pain receptors and are sent to the brain through peripheral nerves, then the spinal cord and finally to your brain. Your brain has to combine data from many different areas, unscramble the signals, determine the location, and the level of threat. Then you are directed to take appropriate action with most of it being automatic.

Pain circuits are etched in with repetition. The process is similar to an athlete or musician learning a skill. However, the frequency of chronic pain impulses is more like a machine gun. Pain circuits become deeply embedded in the nervous system within six to twelve months. Similar to knowing how to ride a bicycle they are permanent.



When you sense signals danger, your body secretes adrenaline, cortisol, histamines, inflammatory proteins called cytokines, which are intended to protect you. Your heart rate increases, there is more blood flow to your muscles, and your blood pressure rises. However, the blood supply to the frontal lobe of your brain (your thinking center) decreases and the speed of nerve conduction increases, which amplifies the sensation of pain.

Acute pain is unpleasant and it is supposed to be. Otherwise, you would be able to ignore it at your peril. It is powerful and a gift. It is how we evolved and survive. But there is nothing good about chronic pain – nothing. You are now continually being exposed to sensations that are supposed to create avoidance behavior, but you cannot escape.

### **Trapped by Pain**

This is what makes chronic pain particularly difficult. When you are trapped by pain (or any life circumstance) you will become frustrated and angry in an effort to escape. Any time you cannot fulfill a basic need such as air, food, or water you will become anxious then angry. Not being in pain is a basic need.

Then the body's physiological response to meet that need will be magnified. Not only are stress hormones elevated, the body's inflammatory response creates havoc throughout your whole body. Humans have a name for this fired up response – anger. Anger is anxiety with a chemical kick.

Pain is intended to cause anxiety and anger. These are linked circuits in the brain. When other circumstances cause anxiety and anger, they will kick up the pain circuits. The neuroscientists have a short saying, "Neurons that fire together, wire together."

Being trapped in pain is intolerable. Dr. Sarno, a famous rehab physician, described it as rage. Research has shown that living in chronic pain is has an equivalent impact on one's quality of life as suffering from terminal cancer.



## The Solution

Healing occurs around the following sequence:

- Awareness
- Hope
- Forgiveness
- Play

You may think that this does not make any sense. Where is the medical terminology? Every recommendation is based on deeply documented medical research. The approach is to implement what we already know. There are three parts to solving your pain:

- Understand chronic pain. It is a neurological problem that is much different than acute pain.
- All the variables that affect your pain must be simultaneously addressed.
- Take control of your own care, which is the most important step.

Once you understand the problem and principles behind solving it, you will find your way out of chronic pain through this largely self-directed process.