



Rest Stop #1: Taking Charge of Your Care

You have spent a couple of weeks learning about chronic pain and have begun to use some of the tools to break up these pain circuits. The key to solving chronic pain is stimulating your brain rewire and shift to different circuits that are not painful. The other important factor is calming down your body's inflammatory response and lowering your stress hormones. This requires using the strategies that are being presented throughout this journey.

The rest stops between the legs of this journey are intended for you to review and practice these approaches. The DOC Journey is arranged in a way that you can re-access the different stops and dive into more detail about each topic. Repetition and looking at the same issue from different angles is important in creating changes in the brain.

Your trip so far

So, here are the five tools that have been presented in this first leg. It is the “homework” and foundation phase of learning how to take back your life.

- Learn about the complex nature of chronic pain
- Begin the expressive writing
- Combine it with the active meditation
- Focus on getting a good night's sleep
- Not discussing your pain with anyone = EVER!!
 - No complaining or gossiping
 - Don't give unasked-for advice or be critical

The Rest Stops are Where the Action Is

Please take these rest stops seriously and focus on creating daily practices that incorporate your version of the healing process. It is only by actively participating that you can stimulate neuroplastic changes in your nervous system also learn to have a say in your autonomic nervous system's response to threat. It appears that you can reprogram your brain around pain from almost any reason in any part of the body. I am slowly learning to not be so surprised at these turnarounds.

The most exciting aspect of this journey is watching patients continue to improve over time. Once you have changed the way your brain processes sensory input, it will continue to do so and most patients who heal, end up thriving at a level that they never thought was possible. We have also realized that once you hit certain tipping point, you can't turn back. You would have to make a clear decision that you want to return to that way of living and commit relearning it. That just doesn't happen.

One surgeon's perspective

I want to share an email I received from a colleague regarding the effect of the DOC (Direct your Own Care) process in his practice. He is a retired orthopedic surgeon who practices addiction medicine. He and I had been in touch and I was helping him bring the *Back in Control* concepts to his patients. It has always been my

intention that my book, the backincontrol.com website, and now [The DOC Journey](#) be used as an adjunct to medical and non-medical providers who treat any aspect of chronic mental and physical pain. It is a largely self-directed program.



Embedding these foundational concepts

You have already begun to learn about chronic pain. That is an ongoing part of the journey. If you have not started it, *Back in Control* provides a framework that breaks down chronic pain into its component parts. Then you are able to figure out your own version of a solution. Each person who had broken free from the grip of chronic pain had unique approach.

The one necessary tool is the expressive free writing. It has been extensively researched and is incredibly effective, especially in light of how simple it is. Somehow, it breaks up spinning thought patterns and calms the inflammatory response. It is not the definitive solution but is the starting point.

The writing creates an awareness and separation in one exercise, which are the first two parts of stimulating your brain to rewire. Active meditation is a quick simple redirection exercise, which is the final step of neuroplasticity. You are actually causing your brain to structurally change, as well as lowering your body's stress response.

Sleep is a major step, and all of the strategies so far are helpful in getting adequate restful sleep. But until you are actually obtaining the sleep you need, it is difficult to really move forward. Obtaining a consistently restful night's sleep is the one main focus of the first leg of this Journey.

The final directive of not discussing your pain or medical care, is not as simple as it sounds. You are suffering and desperate for a solution. Why would it not occupy a good part of your conversations, since it affects every aspect of life. You will not feel like doing this one, but just stop-stop discussing any aspect of your pain.



This rest stop contains some suggestions of how to engage and use these tools. Spend some time with them and see if you can commit to incorporating into your daily routine.