



Virginia Mason™

A Crash Course in Pain Psychology

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What is pain?

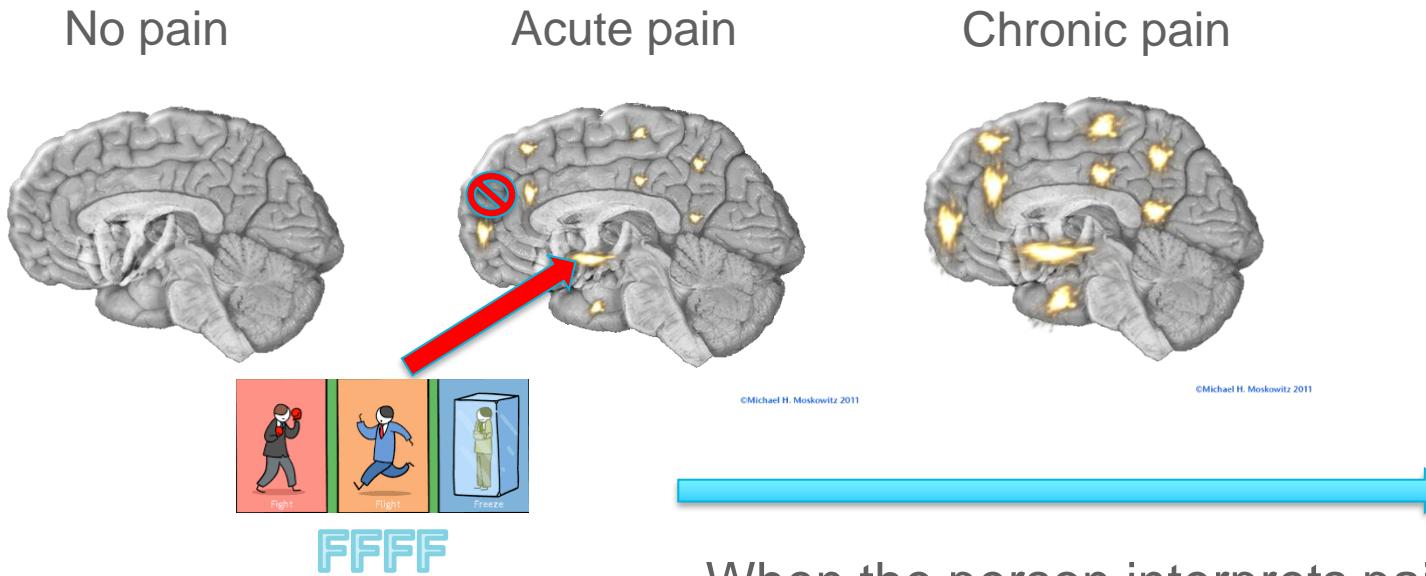
- A survival mechanism that informs our brain of potential threats to keep us safe
- A “danger signal” that results in a change in behavior
- The nervous system is sensitive to any potential threat, *and it's always better to assume a threat than not*

Components of pain psychology

#1: Pain Neuroscience Education

- The “wind up” of the nervous system
- The “brain on pain”
- The alarm system (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)
- Gate control theory
- Pain is the alarm, not the fire (hurt does not necessarily equal harm)

The Brain on Pain – the “Alarm System”

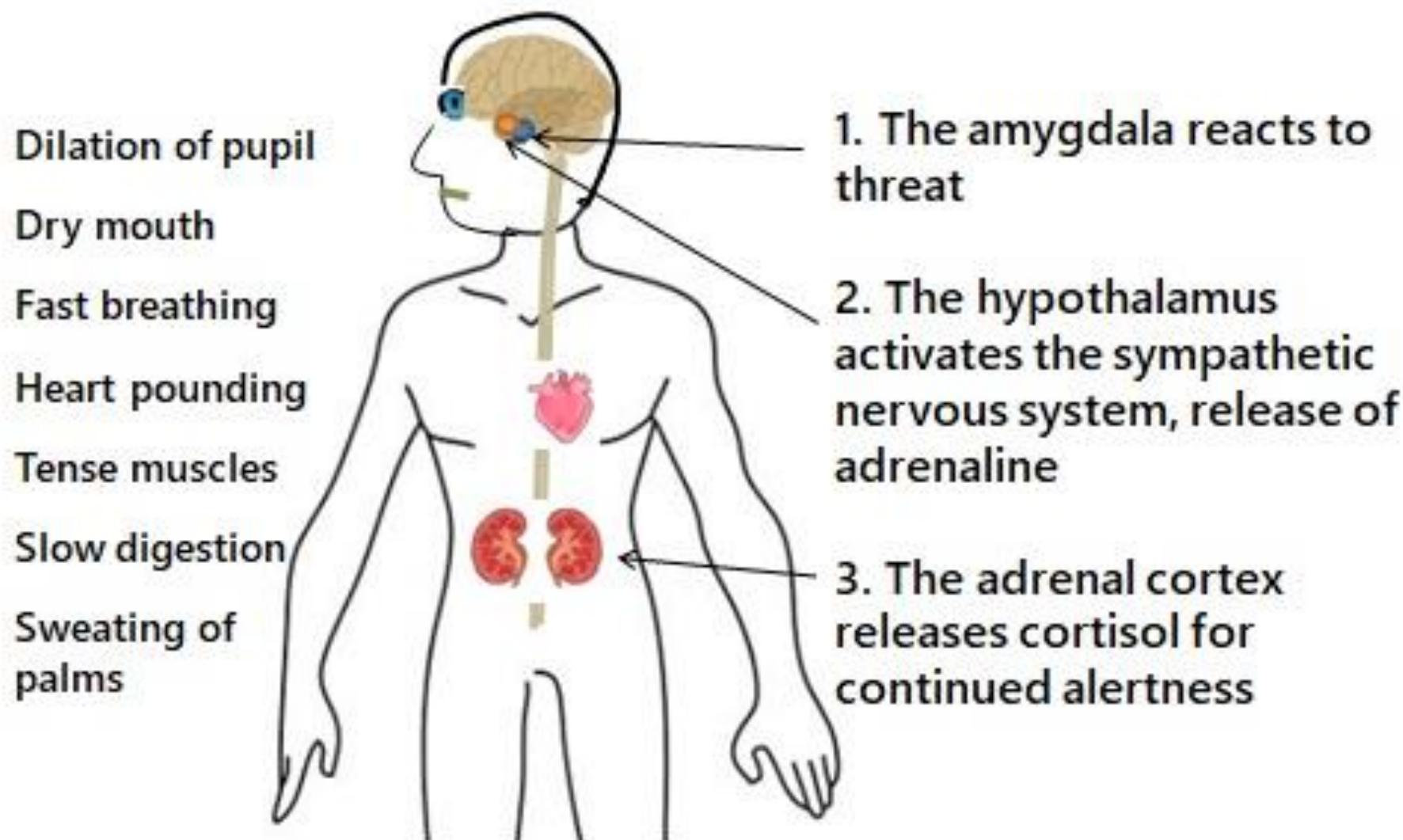


When the person interprets pain as a signal that a threat is present, focuses on pain sensations, and/or catastrophizes, pain and the increased the alarm system response gets “wired” into the brain over time

The “Alarm System:” Behaviors

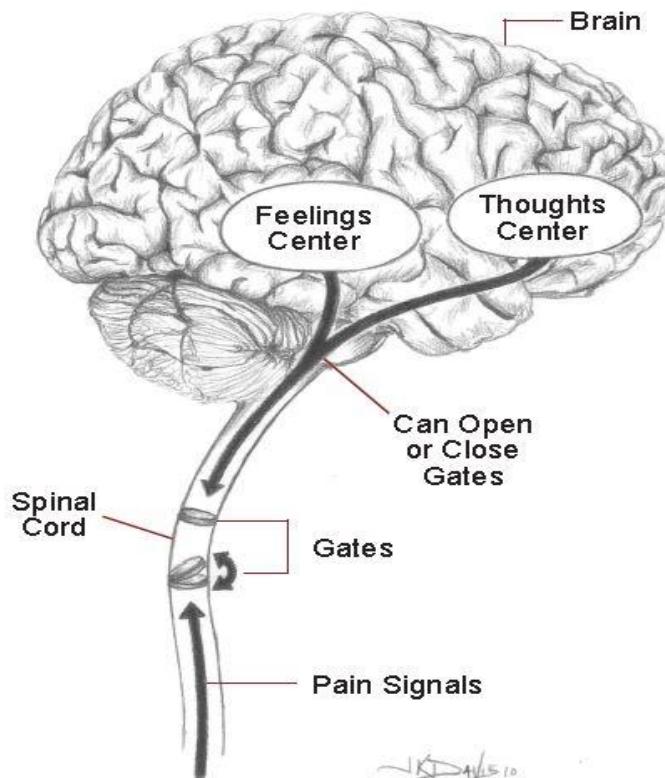


The “Alarm System:” Symptoms



The Pain Gate

Pain Fact #6:
Brain Signals Open or
Close a Pain Gate



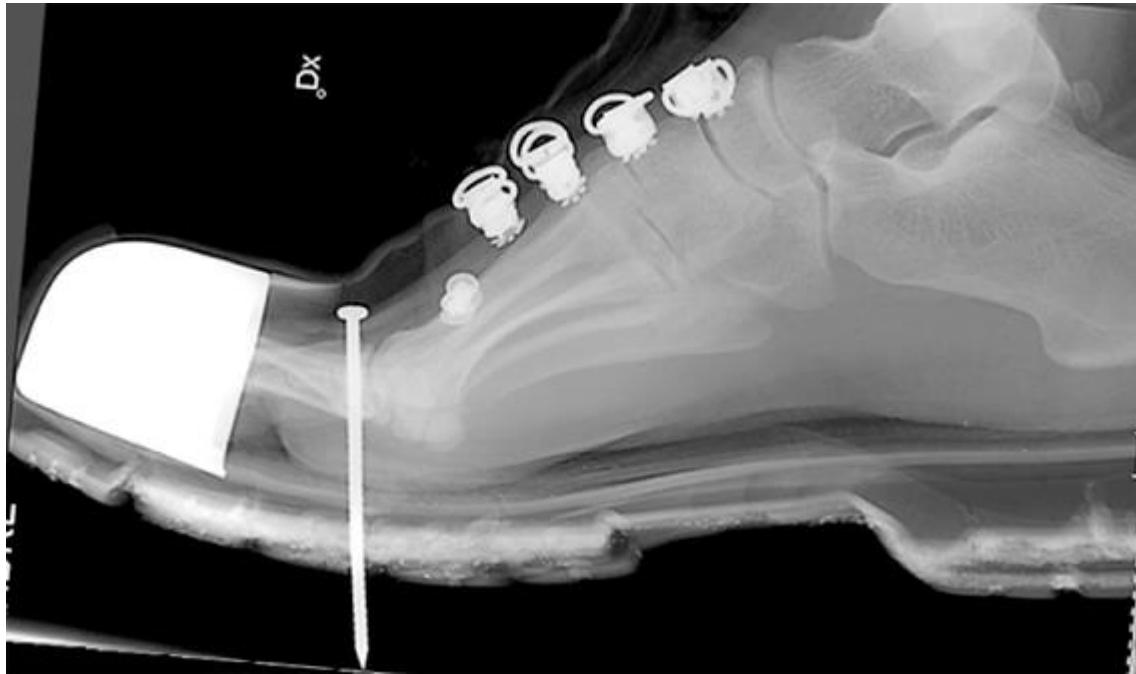
Thorne, 2017

Learning About Managing Chronic Pain – Patient Workbook

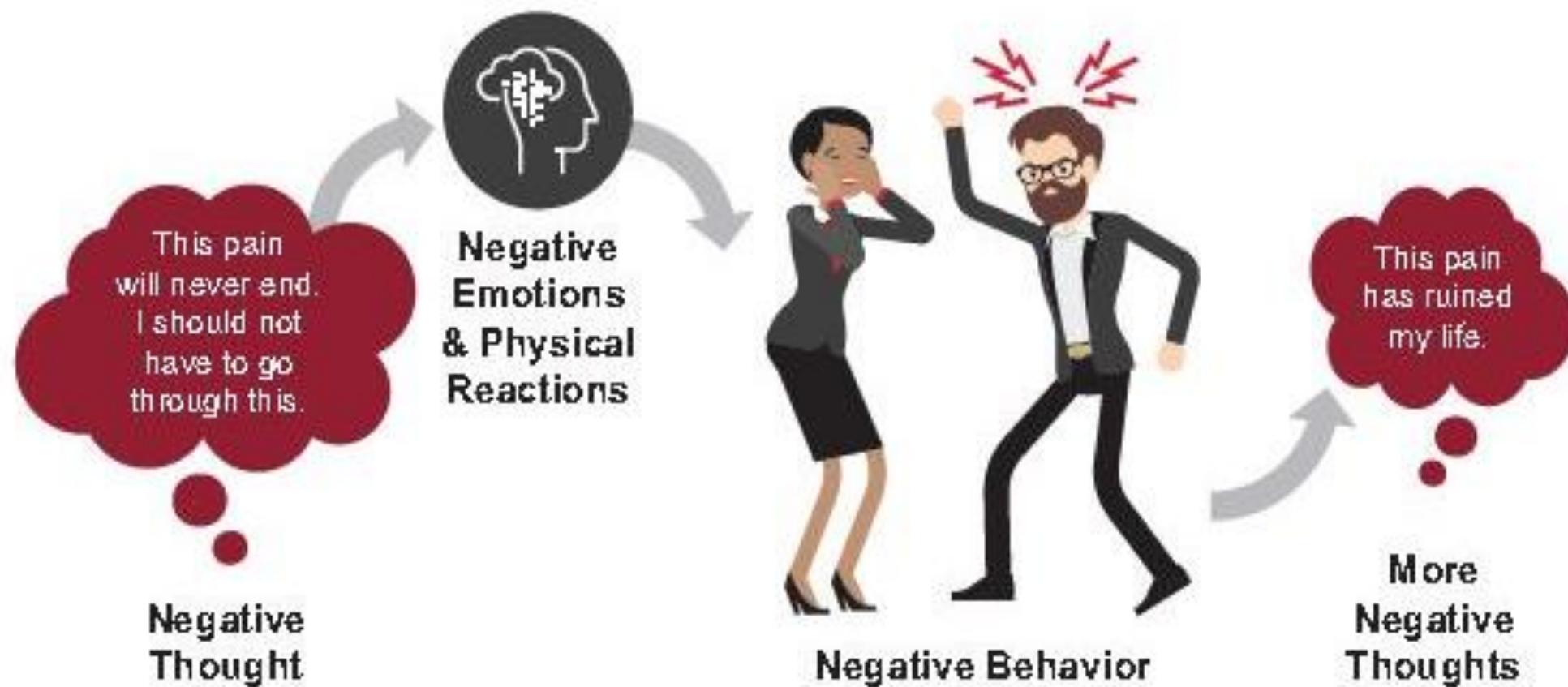
#1 factor that affects the experience of pain



"A Tale of Two Nails"



Start to “think about your thoughts” about pain

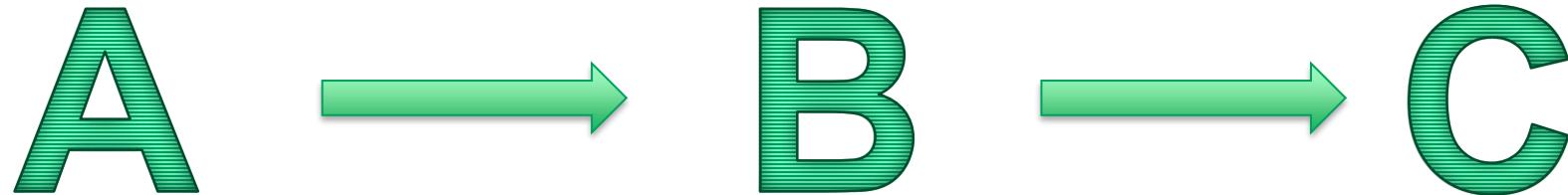


Class topics

#2: Cognitive behavioral therapy skills for managing chronic pain

- ABC framework
- Unhelpful thinking styles
- 3 step CBT process
- Thought Record and ANTS exercises
- Time-based pacing
- Breathing and relaxation techniques

Thoughts About Pain Matter



Antecedent

(situations that happen)

Chronic pain flare

Behaviors/Beliefs/
Thoughts

(how you respond to the situation at hand)

“This is going to be a bad day, and when my pain is bad, I can’t do anything!”

“I might not be able to get rid of my pain, but there are some things I can do to make it better.”

Consequences

(usually emotions, which lead to other behaviors)

Feel depressed, afraid, more focused on pain and the loss of function

Feel calmer, more hopeful, more in control, more focused on CANS vs. CAN’TS

Let's practice: 4-7-8 Breathing method

- Exhale completely with a *whoosh* sound
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **4**
- Hold your breath for a count of **7**
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a *whoosh* sound to a count of **8**
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

#3: Mindfulness-based skills for managing chronic pain

- The “What, Why, and How” of mindfulness-based skills training
- What mindfulness does to the brain and body (based on what research tells us)
- 4 different mindfulness exercises for managing pain

Mindfulness Activity: “Observe the good”

- Pick a body part that is not in pain, or is functioning as intended
- Take a few minutes to bring your awareness and attention to that body part:
 - Make observations about it
 - Then ask: How does this body part help me function? What does it allow me to do?

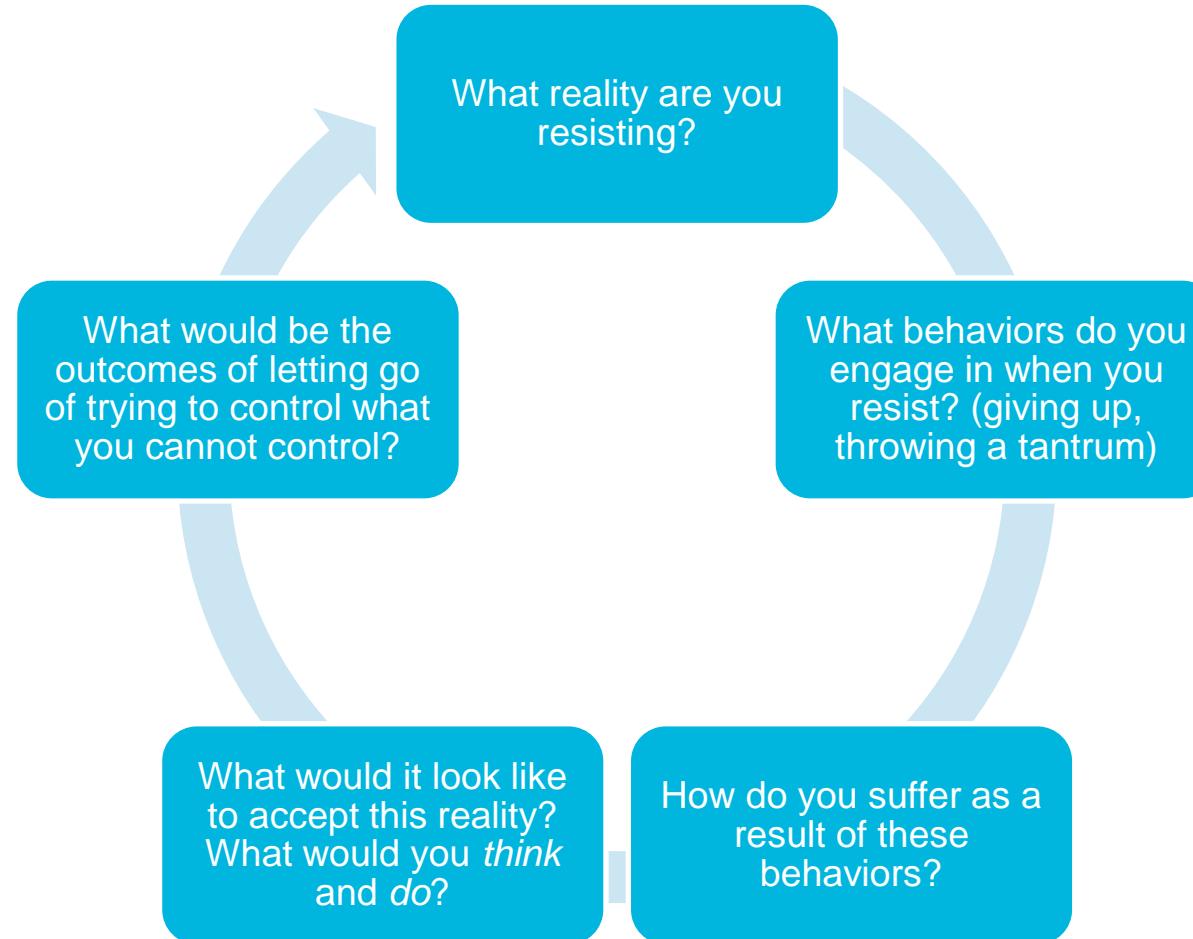
Repeat daily

#4: Radical Acceptance and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy skills for managing chronic pain

- Pain vs. suffering
- “Turning the mind”
- “Values identification” exercise
- The radical acceptance thought exercise

**Introduction to the “Pain Coping Toolkit”
homework assignment**

Radical Acceptance Exercise



Pain Coping Skills Toolkit

Distraction	Sight Sound	Smell Touch	Time-based activity pacing	Think about tasks in terms of <i>time</i> , not category
Cognitive Behavioral therapy skills	ABC Exercise ANTS Worksheet		Laughter therapy	Endorphin production! Even if the laughter is forced ☺
Acceptance and Commitment therapy skills	Values Identification Exercise		Pleasant activity scheduling	More endorphins! Building joyful moments
Visualization	"Happy Place" Pain Visual "Where the focus goes the energy grows"		Nature/Pets	Therapeutic qualities of animals and nature
Dialectical Behavior therapy skills	Radical Acceptance Distress Tolerance		Topical treatments	Heat, ice, massage, topical creams/gels
Gratitude	Everything you are grateful for		Positioning	Moving the body to find some relief
Behavioral activation	"Do one thing" approach		Exercises	Physical therapy, injury prevention, strengthens the immune system
Self fulfilling prophecies	"Thoughts become things"		My helpful narratives about pain	Helpful, realistic mantras I can turn to
Social support	Who is in my support network? Family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, healthcare providers		Mindfulness	"How to train your monkey mind" Guided imagery "Observe the Good"

Weekly pain prescription Class 1:

1. Practice awareness and labeling of the fight/flight/freeze/fawn state
2. Practice the “flipped lid” exercise

Additional resources:

- www.neuroplastix.com
- “Explain Pain” by David Butler
- “Back in Control” 2nd Ed. By David Hanscom, MD
- “Learning About Managing Pain” workbook by Beverly Thorne, PhD, available for free at:
<https://pmt.ua.edu/publications.html>

Weekly pain prescription Class 2:

1. Fill out the CBT Thought Record or the ANTS worksheet 3-4 times per week
2. Practice deep breathing, 4-7-8 breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or laughter once per day

Additional Resources:

- “Managing Chronic Pain: A Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy Approach” by John D. Otis
- “Cognitive Therapy for Chronic Pain: A Step-by-Step Guide” by Beverly E. Thorn

Weekly pain prescription Class 3:

1. Practice a mindfulness activity once per day – frequency matters, not duration! (your body is an average of what you do to it)

Additional Resources:

- “Full Catastrophe Living” by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- “Mindfulness Skills Workbook for Clinicians and Clients” by Debra Burdick
- Smart phone apps for mindfulness:
 - Stop, Breathe, and Think
 - Headspace
 - Calm
 - Insight

Weekly pain prescription Class 4:

1. Fill out the reality acceptance practice worksheet when you observe resistance
2. *Create your pain coping toolkit*

Additional Resources:

- “Man’s Search for Meaning”, by Viktor Frankl
- “DBT Skills Training Manual (2nd edition)”, by Marsha Linehan
- “The Art of Living” by Epictetus Adapted by Sharon Labell

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