

What is Pain Psychology?

Pain psychology is a specialty within psychology. People who practice pain psychology typically have a Ph.D. or Psy.D. in clinical psychology and have training that specializes in chronic pain. Pain psychologists are experts in helping people cope with the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that accompany chronic pain. Many pain sufferers don't realize that how you think and feel impacts pain processing, which ultimately influence your daily choices (and therefore your pain). For more information regarding pain psychology, please visit the American Psychological Association : <https://www.apa.org/topics/pain-management>

Why Pain Psychology?

People often think of pain as a purely physical sensation. However, pain has biological, psychological and emotional factors. Because of the connection of pain to emotions, pain cannot be adequately treated unless emotional stressors are treated. Furthermore, chronic pain can cause feelings such as anger, hopelessness, sadness and anxiety. To treat pain effectively, you must address the physical, emotional and psychological aspects.

What should you expect from the experience?

You will be asked a range of questions about your pain history, mood history, and social history, as well receive recommendations to help you be successful in your pain management. It's important for your psychologist to have a very comprehensive understanding of your stresses and concerns about your pain and the treatment being proposed. From there, your psychologist can determine what coping skills, relaxation techniques or other behavioral approaches to work on with you.

Can relaxation techniques and mindfulness help with pain?

Yes, according to scientific research. A study found that "higher trait mindfulness" correlated with greater deactivation of the posterior cingulate cortex, a region of the brain involved in pain (reference: Zeidan et. al 2018, *PAIN*). In other words, practicing mindfulness may help you experience less pain. However, mindfulness is like exercise. The more you practice, the more effective it becomes.

How can I try mindfulness meditation and relaxation techniques?

You can start immediately by practicing only a few minutes a day. Don't be frustrated if it seems hard to do; it is a practice after all. Some apps you can get on your smartphone include: Headspace, Calm, Aura, 10% Happier, Inscape, and many more. If one doesn't work for you, try another.