

# Distract yourself from pain

Distracting your attention away from pain and concentrating on something else can be an effective pain control strategy. Bruce Eimer has some exercises for you to try



**Fingers Rubbing Together.** First notice your level of pain. Then concentrate on one of your hands. Rub the fingers of that hand against each other and focus on the unique sensations that you can feel in those fingers. As you do this, describe to yourself the texture, temperature, and sensations that you feel. Now notice your pain level. Has it changed? Rubbing your fingers together can also serve as a cue to take several deep breaths and remind yourself of something other than the pain.

**A Little Pain That Distracts.** Again, notice your level of pain. Next, pinch the webbing between your thumb and index finger on one hand or the other. Notice the force of your pinching. Does this help you become less aware of the other discomfort? Now increase the force of your pinching. Notice at what point you become noticeably less aware of the other discomfort.

**Mindful Breathing.** Pure pain doesn't hurt as much when you take away the fear of future pain and the upset over past pain. By taking a few minutes to just pay attention to your breathing without trying to change your breathing, just experiencing the sensations of your breath, you stay in the present and temporarily block out upsetting thoughts and feelings about the past or the future. So take a few minutes to do this now. Pay attention to your breathing, and help yourself stay focused by picking something interesting to look at that is not too far way. And as you continue to pay attention to your breathing, notice how your breathing changes all by itself. Do you also notice that you're feeling more relaxed? What effect does this have on your discomfort?

If you notice your mind wandering, just gently escort your mind back to your breathing and your visual attention back

to the interesting something you have chosen to look at. As you practice this technique of "mindful breathing," you'll find that you become much more aware of each moment in the present. When you stay focused in the present, you cannot be upset by thoughts and feelings about the past or future. You become more mindful of how you feel in the present, at this very moment. Less mental and physical energy is spent worrying about future pain, or regretting or reliving past pain.

As you become more mindful of the present moment, you find that you begin to feel more in control because you're taking charge of how you employ your mental and emotional energy. So, whenever you catch yourself getting caught up in upsetting thoughts or becoming preoccupied with feelings of discomfort, you can now interrupt those thoughts and shift your attention to something else that is pleasant or neutral, such as your breathing, or a pleasant or interesting visual object. Then you're better able to leave any discomfort behind.

As you become more able to be in the present, you get better at interrupting negative, unproductive, or upsetting thoughts and thinking of something else. You realize that your thoughts, emotions, even your impulses are not reality. You create your own reality and are in charge of that reality. You are in charge of how you respond to what happens to you and around you.

**Clenched Fist Technique.** Pay attention to the concentration of tension as you make a fist with one hand and squeeze it tighter and tighter. Keep squeezing it tighter. Now open your fist and feel the tension releasing. Shake your hand and release the rest of the tension. Keep shaking it. Can you make this procedure

more effective by breathing in deeply as you clench your fist and exhaling slowly through your mouth as you unclench the fist? Does this help you release more tension?

**Going with the Flow of Your Attention.** What can you temporarily focus your attention on in your immediate physical surroundings? Can you study the grains in the wooden furniture? Can you study the different shades and colors in the wood? Can you visually trace the shape of the tiles in the bathroom or on the floor and study how they fit together? How many tiles are there in each row? Do you notice the shadows on the wall, or on the floor? Remove your shoes and rub your feet on the floor. Notice the feel of the carpet, hardwood floor, tiles, or linoleum. Listen to the sounds around you. What do you hear?

**Mental Arithmetic.** Do some mental arithmetic in your head. Perhaps you can count backwards from 200 by threes. Or, take the number two to the nth power. Or, count backwards from 500. Or, beginning with any number, keep adding five. Does this help you become less aware of the discomfort temporarily?

**Become Absorbed in a Book or Movie.** Become temporarily absorbed in a book, watching television, watching a movie, or listening to a piece of music. You can also simply imagine that you are doing so. Does this help you become less aware of the discomfort temporarily? n

Clinical psychologist Bruce Eimer is a pain sufferer who uses coping strategies and self hypnosis to keep his own pain under control and to help his patients cope with their pain. You'll find these self-help strategies in his book *Hypnotize Yourself Out of Pain Now!* published by New Harbinger, price £11.99.