



## Resilience

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Based upon:  
Revisiting the importance of resilience in pain

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Resilience refers to our ability to recover, to adjust to change, or to “bounce back” from a difficult situation. It is a measure of our “toughness”. Our emotions can affect our ability to be resilient. It is well-known that having chronic pain can affect your mood and emotional state. It can negatively change the way you view yourself and others. In fact, there is evidence showing the same areas of the brain process emotions and pain. For this reason, recognizing positive emotions and practicing them in our daily living can help us increase our resilience.

Studies have also shown that your emotional state can affect the way you perceive pain. Your emotions or affective states can be either positive or negative. Some negative affective states are: sadness, fear, anger, guilt, hatred, rejection. These have been associated with higher levels of pain, lower tolerance for pain and greater use of pain medications. These negative states have also been related to increased fatigue, more mental health conditions and poorer overall quality of life. On the other hand, positive affective states include: happiness, love, enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, empathy (compassion and concern for others). Staying positive and keeping a positive outlook have been linked to lower pain levels, decreased use of pain medication and higher tolerance of pain. In one study, people who suffer from chronic pelvic and chronic low back pain report higher negative affect and lower positive affect states when compared to healthy people.

How can we improve our emotional state to better manage our pain ? Positive emotion helps us become more creative and active. It also empowers us to surround ourselves with people who provide support and reassurance. This, in turn, improves our resilience, that is our ability to recover from difficulties and start over with a fresh perspective. Specific activities have been created to promote a positive affective state in people with chronic pain. Some of these have been called: “acts of kindness,” “savoring a beautiful day,” “gratitude activities,” among others. A psychotherapist can help you incorporate these into your daily activities. New techniques and interventions are being developed to continue the challenging but rewarding task of helping people with chronic pelvic pain.

### Broaden-and-Build Theory

- Positive emotions **broaden** our options for thought and action.
  - Thought is more creative, flexible, integrative, open and efficient.
- Positive emotions **undo** lingering effects of negative emotions.
  - Many of the negative effects are physiological.
- Positive emotions help **build** psychological resiliency for later.
  - Resources to better “**bounce back**” better from adverse situations.
  - Draw people toward you for greater social support.