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MIND OVER PAIN: THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a hands-on, skills-based approach to problem solving that is used to treat depression, anxiety, chronic pain and other chronic illnesses. It helps you to use the power of your mind to keep you more comfortable and content.

A formal CBT program is not like traditional counseling. CBT is typically 8-10 sessions, during which you explore your emotional and behavioral responses to your pain. You will then work with your CBT practitioner to develop alternative responses that you can practice. CBT for pain is most effective when it is used in combination with other medical, surgical or physical therapy treatments.

This handout will help you to understand CBT and to try some CBT techniques on your own.

You may have experienced a time when you were not feeling well and were visited by a dear friend. Surprisingly, you may have felt better when she or he was visiting. Perhaps you have also experienced a time when you were not feeling well and you saw someone that you do not like. Did you notice that you may have felt worse when you were with that person? This is the power of your mind to change your pain experiences. Using techniques such as CBT (also Mindfulness Meditation and Resilience Training) can help you to use the power of your brain to work for you and improve your quality of life.

Negative thoughts, particularly those associated with stressful ideas, actually change the chemistry in your brain and body. These thoughts have been shown to activate the adrenal gland, which releases stress hormones. These stress hormones cause your body to produce more inflammation and other chemicals that can increase pain. In addition, negative thoughts change the way the nerves in your spinal cord and brain process pain. Learning to change your thoughts about your pain can really reduce the pain that you experience.

This is not just a matter of putting on a happy face and pretending everything is okay, CBT involves looking at all sides of a problem without emotion and then finding a more balanced approach to how we

respond. CBT can change the chemistry in your brain and nerves that engage in sensing pain to reduce the sensation of pain.

People often put everything else on hold while they wait for their pain to get better. This can lead to a feeling of failure if the pain continues. Instead, pick 2 or 3 things that are important to you. Break each goal down into baby steps and give yourself credit for each step that you achieve. Remember these goals during a pain flare.

Do not think that the recommendation to try CBT implies that your pain is in your head. It is not. Pain is complex and the longer you have had your pain, the more difficult it may be to get a simple cure. You want to feel that you, and not your pain, are in control of your life. While working with your pain provider to find treatments for your pain, you focus on creating a life where you can do the things that are most important to you. CBT helps to harvest the power of your brain to work with you, not against you. It can help you to regain some control over your life.

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Last revised on 12.10.2022

For more information about other chronic pelvic pain syndromes visit:

International Pelvic Pain Society

www.pelvicpain.org/public

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