

Pain Behavior Tool

Living with chronic pain can wear a person down. Before long you may find yourself thinking self-defeating thoughts like, "I'll never be able to have a normal life," or "What's the point in exercising when it hurts so much?" Your brain is a powerful tool — negative thinking can amplify your pain, while positive thinking may ease it.

Exercise 1: In the table below, write down the negative thoughts and messages you have about your pain and when they occur. Then see if you can find a way to make these messages more positive. You may be surprised at how much better you'll feel!

Negative thoughts	When you had them	Positive thoughts
Example: What's the point in exercising when my joints hurt from arthritis?	Tried to use treadmill at home	Exercising may hurt now, but it will eventually ease my pain and help me get around more easily

Exercise 2: Focusing on your pain only makes it worse. If you can distract yourself with interesting activities, your pain will often fade into the background. In the space below, write down some things you enjoy doing that you can try the next time your pain is particularly bothersome. If you want, note when you tried that technique and how well it worked. If the first thing you try doesn't help, try something else.

Distracting activity	When you tried it	How well did it work?
Example: Reading	After overexerting myself in the garden and experiencing a flare-up of back pain	Very well. Picking a real page-turner helped.