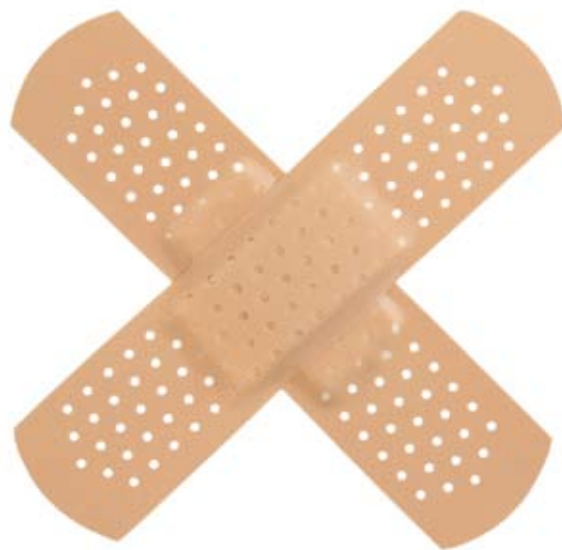


NLP AND PAIN RELIEF

By Eve Menezes Cunningham



Not all pain is bad. We feel “good” pain when we’ve worked out that bit harder than usual and are far more aware of our muscles. Especially when they’re in places we’ve forgotten we had muscles. The pain of childbirth (I’m told) fits into the “good pain” category as the end result is so worth it.

Most people do whatever they can to avoid pain. But even “bad pain” has its uses. It tells us when there’s something wrong and forces us to investigate further.

People with the rare disorder known as CIPA don’t have any way of registering pain. This means they’re at risk all the time. They continue to run on broken bones, hold items that are actually burning them and do other things that sound so painful they’re making me cringe just thinking about it.

But most of us feel the pain of injuries, illnesses and exceedingly hot and cold temperatures. This makes us react instinctively to prevent further damage.

I was interviewed by another journalist about endometriosis today. Talking to her reminded me how bad it was when I was in daily pain without knowing what was wrong or what I could do to ease it. But the clear signal that something wasn’t right with my body made me persevere in getting a diagnosis and treatment.

Several years on, by taking extra care of myself, I’ve learned to manage the pain so that I’m only on painkillers for a few days at a time. Things like eating well, cutting out alcohol, doing yoga, making sure I get enough exercise and sleep and so on aren’t wellbeing luxuries but health essentials.

It was important to me to find natural ways to deal with my pain. I’d met other women with endometriosis who’d actually lost their hearing and sight and had other terrible side

effects from the medications.

Before I started getting better, though, I wanted nothing more than for one of the doctors or specialists to tell me “This is what you’ve got and this is how you fix it”. Instead, it was a long process of trial and error.

I began using crystals for self healing because nothing else was working. When I held a stone over the pain, it dissipated in a way that impressed me so much, it led to my training and qualifying as a crystal therapist.

Hypnotism or visualisation might work well for you. I’ve had some success with visualisation exercises but have needed to feel good enough to begin with in order to get the most from them.

Ultimately, my pain empowered me to learn to listen to my own body (instead of relying on doctors and specialists) and to figure out what I needed myself. I became interested in complementary therapies (to help relieve the pain). This led to my training as a coach and coaching myself to become a freelance journalist. As well as loving this new work, I needed to find something that would enable me to work from home when necessary.



Even though I often work longer hours than I ever worked in an office, I can manage my time so that I give my body a break when I need it without letting anyone down.

I now see the pain as a blessing as it forced me to reassess my whole life and make shifts until I could manage. The huge changes I made to my lifestyle have already made me much healthier overall than I’d have been if I’d continued on the “my body lets me get away with treating it like rubbish” track.

Training as a coach and in NLP taught me about resourceful states. This helped me psych myself up enough to get better treatment from my GP than I’d received when I’d been turning up feeling victimised each time.

Chronic pain is exhausting. Learning to keep my outcome (a diagnosis and treatment plan that would work for me) in mind was especially helpful. But I’d already had surgery by the time I started this training so had experienced some relief from the pain already.

Yoga has helped me enormously, too. The challenging part is to practice each day, even if I’m just at home. By opening up and stretching different parts of the body, yoga can help alleviate tension and stresses. It’s also taught me to breathe into the pain instead of trying to resist it. Meditating on it and paying close attention to your body is not as easy a fix as popping some pills. But there are no side effects – it’s definitely worth trying with an open mind.

The American writer, Maya Angelou said, “Just because you’re in pain, doesn’t mean you have to be a pain”. I heard this expression at the right time for me. I knew enough about her life to know that she was no stranger to pain. Ultimately, I found that by focusing on my pain as little as possible (instead of it being my whole world), it really did get better. ●



If you're in pain, use your NLP knowledge by:

- Reminding yourself that you can choose a resourceful state and that this will help you much more than curling up in a heap (I know the feeling) under your duvet.
- Setting well-formed outcomes which you can then adapt as necessary.
- Being flexible and open to trying whatever might work.
- Experimenting with hypnotherapy, visualisation and trance work to help you ease or manage your pain.
- Reminding yourself about all the resources that are available to you. Ask your close friends and family for whatever you need. Talk to your doctors and specialists and make use of support groups, books, DVDs and other resources to help you understand more about your painful condition and things that might alleviate it.
- Playing around with the submodalities (maybe imagining the pain as a shape or colour) and experimenting to make the pain more manageable.
- Exceeding your expectations with enhanced communication skills so that no matter how frustrating the situation, you're able to build rapport and express yourself in a way that gets you the help you need.

“Just because you're in pain, doesn't mean you have to be a pain” - Maya Angelou

LEARN TO SPEAK YOUR BODY'S LANGUAGE

Sit as comfortably as you can and take some deep breaths. With each exhalation, breathe out your pain. With each inhalation, breathe in feelings of wellbeing. When you feel centred and calm, ask the painful part of yourself what it's trying to communicate to you.

Make notes of whatever words, images or thoughts crop up. It may sound incredibly strange but by paying attention to your body's whispers, it will stop feeling that it has to shout so loudly to get any attention.

Is that sore throat telling you that there's something (no matter how unappealing) you just have to speak up about?

Could a problem with your feet alert you to the fact that your subconscious is worried that you're going in the wrong direction?

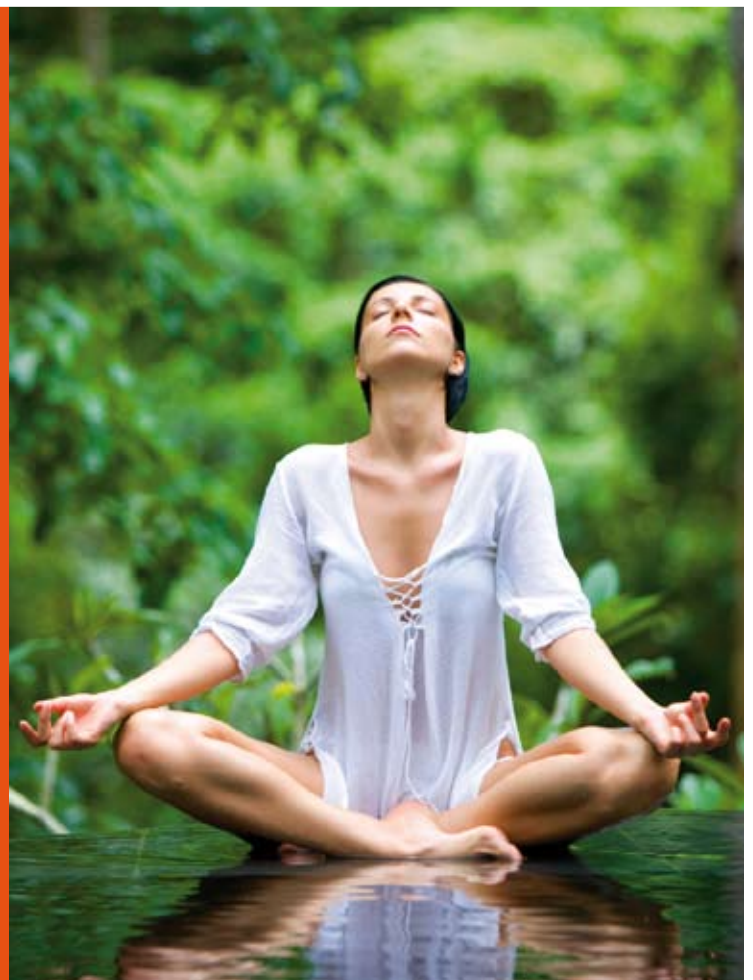
Might that knee injury be your body's way of encouraging you to find a more flexible approach to an old problem?

Maybe that backache is trying to get you to spread the load a bit and accept help and support from others?

Is that stomach upset a manifestation of your fears that you can't digest something that's going on in your life right now?

We're all different and you'll intuitively come up with the right message for yourself if you just take the time to centre yourself and listen.

If you're struggling to figure out what different parts are saying to you, Louise Hay's books might help you learn to decode your own unique signals. Debbie Shapiro's *The BodyMind Workbook* and *Your Body Speaks Your Mind* might also help.



Pain relief and **medicine**

Dr Claire Jetha trained as a GP but has a more holistic approach than most. She works at Penny Brohn Cancer Care (formerly Bristol Cancer Care Centre) in special integrative health.

Dr Jetha says, "I felt frustrated by narrowness so looked at different way to practice medicine." Now she works with complementary therapies, too. She helps her patients do other things to feel better, like working with their emotions.

She remembers thinking that many patients were having their "cancer well treated but who they are as a person was being lost along the way." The Bristol Approach includes offering psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, nutrition and spiritual healing. Treating them as an individual is a key part of the programme.

Dr Jetha also trained in hypnotherapy and set up her own practice. She says, "NLP with hypnosis is even more effective. There's lots of evidence and they can even do operations under hypnosis."

In her private practice, Dr Jetha works with women who are preparing for childbirth. She says, "I offer four sessions and it's interweaved. It's about trusting your body and helping people imagine the sensations from their womb and having a switch where they're On or Off or Halfway so they can feel but it's also taking the edge off the pain."

Dr Jetha uses hypnotherapy and NLP to help herself, too. She says, "I used to have a dental phobia but had a root filling six months ago and I did self

hypnosis." She created a CD to help her prepare and when the dentist finished and apologised for taking so long, she hadn't even noticed. She says, "A lot of pain is fear. There's a core of pain but a lot is going on around that. Working with people with cancer, breathing into the pain can change it. I use NLP techniques, imagining pain as a shape or a colour and changing it."

Dr Jetha has seen a shift in NHS Pain Clinics. While people with chronic pain used to be sent home with "huge amounts of pain killers, they're now told about meditation and acupuncture."

A lot of it is attitude, too. When we're in pain, we want someone to take it away. Dr Jetha says, "Going to see somebody when you're in pain takes away your resources. You don't feel so proactive. It tends to limit you." She recommends "finding somebody like a hypnotherapist or NLP Practitioner who can help you learn some tools and techniques which you can then use on yourself. It's about finding the right thing for the individual."

Resources

www.pennybrohncancercare.org have a helpline and hope to offer some of their courses free in the future.

www.drclairejetha.co.uk

www.louisehay.com

www.edanddebshapiro.com

www.applecoaching.com

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