
A PLAY WRITTEN BY
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A CONVERSATION WITH PAIN

Hi, it is me your
pain...seriously,
can we talk?

Sure! How may I
help you!

Full audio recording available on
www.ThePainTruth.org

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Day 1: Hello I'm your pain... seriously, can we talk?

Knock on the door

I wonder who that could be?

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, I am your pain... can we talk? You need to know the truth about me.

Who? What? Pain? Truth?

Again, I'm your pain and I know it's weird to be introducing myself to you like this. Frankly I feel awkward coming out to rationally speak with you considering we're not exactly on good terms right now.

What? What's going on here?

I know you didn't know that I could speak or even think, never mind acknowledge that I am actually intelligent. Sorry, I don't want this conversation to be just about me.

Ok. I'm not following this, what do you want?

I just want to talk to you, tell you the truth about pain so we can improve our relationship and get along with each other.

You, my pain, have the nerve to come over and to talk to me? After all that you've done to me to ruin my life?

I am fully aware that you currently don't like me. In fact that is the understatement of the century, you hate me, you loath me, and fear me and pray that I would just go away. You actually wish that I never even came into your life in the first place.

I can't disagree with you there, go on...

Needless to say, our current relationship isn't going so well. I am almost always here with you and yet you're always either ignoring me or doing something to get rid of me. Have you ever thought how that makes ME feel? I actually really resent you for that as I want you to appreciate me.

Are you kidding me? You've caused me nothing but agony and you've literally been a pain in my life. Do you seriously expect me to like you? If you came by to tell me that, just go away, there's no point in us having this conversation.

I know, I know that you are repulsed by me, it's not like you're trying to hide it from me or from anyone else for that matter.

I can hear you talking to yourself about hating me and I can clearly hear you every time you mention me to others like I'm this nasty evil thing...it's really not nice when you do that to me... it does upset me.

I know that you regularly go see all those people to make me go away. Do you have any idea how much it bothers me that you go so much out of your way to try and get rid of me? You pay strangers to break us up; people who hardly know you or me or anything about our relationship.

Well, if you're so smart and can overhear what I'm always thinking and you already know that I'm seeing a bunch of people to get rid of you, why don't you just leave? Get lost, take a hint. I don't want you around me anymore.

Sighhh...if it were only that easy; I know for a fact that when you wake up in the mornings and there I am with you, you make it obvious that you don't really want to be with me and I fully realize that when I'm there, I make you sad. Believe me... I don't want to be there with you in the mornings, any more that you want me. I am just simply doing what I am supposed to do, which is to protect you.

Protect me? Well I no longer wish to have your protection or your services, thank you. You know where the door is, so use it and please leave.

You really think that I want to be here? Heck no! I'm here because it is my duty to serve and protect you and what do I get in return? I get your constant thoughts on how you fear and despise me. Have you ever sat down and asked ME what I want? That's why I am here with you today so we can openly, calmly and hopefully rationally talk about it for the first time.

Talk about what? I can't even believe I'm having this ridiculous conversation with you...the pain of my existence.

Sometimes when I just need to spend the whole day with you because you need me, you just ignore me by pressing on and doing whatever you want even if I'm not happy with what you're doing. You know our relationship is bad when so often you do things knowing for well that I am going to get irritated, but you push through anyways.

I do my best to ignore you.

It's really not nice to be ignored. In fact it bothers me soooo much when you just pretend as if I'm not there and push on. You should know that I fully remember every time that you try to brush me aside and pretend to move on with your life as if I don't even exist.

What am I supposed to do? I HAVE TO ignore you if I want to have any kind of life left. You've already taken most of my life away from me. You've stopped me from doing so many of the things I used to once love and enjoy doing... and now you have the audacity to get offended when I ignore you when I want to have at least a little bit of a normal life?

Sure, you can always close your eyes and pretend that I'm just not there, but realize that every time you do it, I have a pretty good memory and just get peeved off at you for ignoring me. The only option I have left is to hang out with you even more often and more closely to make it harder for you to ignore me the next time.

Why would you do such a thing? What's wrong with you?

There you go, blaming me. You realize that these accusations aren't helping our relationship here.

What relationship? How can I make it any clearer, I don't want a relationship with you, in fact I want to have nothing to do with you.

I'm just going to pretend that I didn't hear that. Here I am pouring my heart out to you and doing my best to share with you my thoughts so we can get along better with each other. It's like I'm still talking to myself. Can you please just listen and stop being so defensive... please give me a few minutes and just hear me out.

Alright, fine. I am all ears. Tell me whatever you wish.

Ok, let's start from fresh again. I didn't come here to argue or fight. What you don't seem to understand yet, is that I AM ON YOUR SIDE! So I don't really get it why you want to fight with me so much?

I have to fight; I can't just give up and let you take over my life. What am I supposed to do, just let you win?

You must already realize that in the end I ALWAYS “win”. Notice that I’m using air quotes when I say the word win? I honestly don’t want to win... I’m just as tired as you are in this battle that we’re constantly fighting.

Here I am frequently trying to get your attention while you mostly either pay no attention to me or think of ways to free yourself of me. You know how upset I get when you go on the internet? ...and look for this or that magic fix to take me away?

You can’t possibly blame me for that, I’m tired of all this, I just want you to go away... please.

It’s obvious what you want but isn’t it time that you asked me what I want? Go ahead ask me, why are you here? How can I help you? For once, it would be so comforting to have you pay attention and fully acknowledge me and ask me how I’m doing. Ask me what I want and what my needs are.

Well, I’m sorry, I just had no idea that you even cared for my help. You seriously want me to talk to you?

Yes, but sadly our current relationship feels like a battle where I’m trying to communicate with you while you go behind my back and do your best to just shut me down. You don’t even want to listen to me, you don’t think that I have anything worthwhile to say... and that really bothers me. I am simply doing my job, which is to help protect you.

The truth is I’ve never thought of talking to my pain, cause I loath you.

What’s most upsetting in our relationship is that you don’t appreciate my intentions, as my intentions are always only good. I’m only doing what I think is best for you and yet you still despise me. How did we get here?

I don’t know how to answer that question. I think I need a drink.

You know what, I’ve gotten enough off my chest for one day and I don’t want to overwhelm you. How about we make deal? I’ll drop by once a day for the next few days and we can have a civilized conversation. I promise that if we work on compassion and understanding of each other, we can make this work. Then I’ll no longer be such pain to you.

I’d be happy if you were just less of a pain to me. I’m gonna go lie down. This conversation’s got me exhausted. Bye.
Bye.

Day 1

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. Ignoring pain and pushing on is not a long-term solution, it may sometimes make the nervous system even more sensitized
2. The constant search to eliminate the pain may also sometimes make the nervous system even more sensitized
3. A negative relationship with pain may also sometimes make the nervous system even more sensitized



Day 2: Hello I'm your pain... I've literally saved you ass

Knock on the door

I wonder who that could be?

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, It's me, your pain again... can we continue our talk?

Oh no. I really don't see the point of this. You only make me feel bad about myself.

Obviously we are both going through a rough patch in our relationship and I really don't blame you or me for any of this. You know we weren't always like this? There was a time when you really appreciated me.

I doubt that there was ever a time when I actually liked you or appreciated you.

I know you don't remember but I clearly recall the day you were born and when you took in your very first breath. It was scary but I was right there with you to make you cry. When you cried you were instantly held, soothed and comforted. As soon as I felt that you were safe and well protected, I let you be and you quietly slept.

And every time your tiny little body needed and craved food, I came along and caused you the discomfort to make you cry again, and almost immediately you were tended to and fed. As soon as I felt that you were safe, once again I left you and let you be. I was always there for you in the background and eagerly awaited your beckoning call only to serve you. We had a pretty good reciprocal relationship back then; you knew that I was there whenever you needed something.

Ahh that's so sweet of you. You're a pain, don't try to sugar coat yourself like you're something good.

It really sounds weird saying it out loud but when you were a baby, it was my job to make you cry. When I made you cry, you were held, comforted and fed. Other times I made you cry so you would be changed, I literally protected your ass.

...And I truly thank you for that.

As you got older, I recall that you put this sharp thing in your mouth and I made you scream and someone came to your rescue and right away took it out of your mouth. If it wasn't for me, who knows what could've happened.

Thanks for that also.

Sometimes you didn't think I was that useful to have around, for instance when you were teething, I'd make you cry in the middle of the night. There was really nothing anyone could do other than comfort you or put some cold things on your gums to ...ummm I guess that's when I realized that I'm not really wanted even though I'm just always trying to help.

Honestly, why make a baby needlessly experience pain? I was just teething.

Yes I know I'm a pain, but I am telling you my side of the story so you can appreciate that I have always only had the best of intentions for you and I've cared for you more than anyone else in your life, from the day you were born until now.

Again, I appreciate all that you've done for me. But I'm not a child and really don't need you anymore... and I certainly don't need you to make me cry.

As you got older I taught you so many things to help you survive in this dangerous world; from small things to saving your life. When you had a pebble in your shoe, I made you take your shoe off to take out the rock so you could run faster. When you fell down, I made you cry so you could get someone's attention to make sure that you were okay and as soon as I was assured that you were fine, I would let you be and you'd keep on playing.

I never wanted to be a nuisance to you. I just always have to make sure that you're okay. If there's ever any doubt about your well being, well I'm right there.

I've never thought about how much you've helped me over the years. Again that was in the past, I no longer want you.

You recall the time when you ate something that didn't agree with you, there I was and thanks to me, you were taken care of.

I've had my share of stomach pains but thank goodness it was often just bloating and gas and all I needed was a good fart.

Exactly, and if a fart was all that was needed, I left you alone, no questions asked. In fact, whenever you needed attention in any part of your body, I was there and I sometimes forced you to get help. If it wasn't for me, you would've never rested or have taken care of yourself in all those times you were ill or injured.

Again, thank you.

I don't really need to be thanked for all the relentless years I've taken care of you. Just know that I have been on guard for your wellbeing 24/7 with not even a second break. I don't need a break as I have only one duty and that duty is to help you survive.

I'm here, so I've obviously survived so you've done something right. Are we done yet?

I've helped you here and there ever since you took your first breath, but it was always for relatively short periods. I was there when you stubbed your toes or hit your shin against a coffee table, I was there when you got a tiny paper cut, I was there when you burnt your hand in the kitchen, and I was even there when you accidentally had that hot jalapeño pepper.

...oooff, I remember that, I even felt it the next day on the toilet.

I sometimes heard you shout profanity when I came around, but as soon as I knew you were okay, I'd leave and you just went back to your regular life.

I do miss those good ol' days when I would just be there for you for brief moments where I'd come to your rescue and you'd acknowledge me and after just some time, you'd be in safety again and I'd let you go about your business.

I agree, I also miss those days when you didn't overstay your welcome.

Whatever happened to us? I was never meant to ALWAYS be there with you. It is not my fault that I am there with you so often; I'm only here because I sense that you're currently not safe but in danger. I don't know if that's actually true or not, but the truth doesn't matter to me, the only thing that matters is that I perceive it.

If I perceive that you're in anyway not safe and in danger, I'm going to have to be with you, whether you like me or not, that's not relevant.

To be honest, my job is not to be liked by you or anyone else. I don't care if you like me or not. I have a job and duty and that is to protect and guard you till my last breath.

That's what I dread the most, I worry that you're always going to be with me till my last breath... and that makes me feel really awful.

If I ever feel anything threaten you, I will not tolerate it and will stay until you feel 100% safe and no longer threatened. I know my time and place, if you're not in any danger, I'm not gonna come. I reiterate, I am only there with you when YOU tell me that you're

feeling you're in danger and need help. I don't want to always be there with you any more than you do.

The reason we're here today and having this open dialogue is that I want to tell you some things that I've been so desperate to tell you but just haven't had the opportunity to clearly and honestly express myself to you until now.

I'm listening.

As your pain, I am well aware that neither of us is currently happy. I don't want to be here and you don't want me here which isn't exactly a recipe for a healthy relationship. We need serious couples therapy and we need to talk and I'll be honest, I'm over the moon that I finally have you and your undivided attention here.

Just give me a few minutes and hear me out. What if I told you that I know a way to get us both out of this mess? I am actually excited to finally have a chance to directly tell you how we can fix our currently messy relationship.

Now you got my attention... go on.

I really need a break and promise to come back tomorrow for another visit and talk about how we can improve our relationship.

Are you serious? As soon as I'm ready to hear for what you have to say, you're leaving me?

Yes, I'm afraid so, I promise to be back tomorrow. See you tomorrow. Bye.

Day 2

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The only purpose of pain is to warn you of potential danger and help you survive
2. When the nervous system perceives that you are in any kind of potential danger, it warns you by making you experience pain... and that could be anywhere in the body
3. When the nervous system perceives that you are in safety, pain then serves no purpose and will not be experienced



Day 3: Hello I'm your pain... accept me as I am

Knock on the door and a doorbell

I wonder who that could be?

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, It's me, your pain again... you have no idea how excited I am to be continuing our talk?

As much as I hate to admit it, I was actually looking forward to you coming back as you promised. You were going to give me ideas on how to fix our relationship together. Go ahead, say what you gotta say, I'm taking notes.

You see, the quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our relationships. The relationship we have with our family members determines the quality of our lives. If the relationship with our parents, siblings, partner or children is that of hate, resentment or anger, you can assume that we will have a low quality of life. On the other hand if the relationships are based on love, caring, compassion, understanding and acceptance, we will have a pretty high quality of life.

Okay.

That includes the relationship we have with our friends, coworkers or neighbours. If we have a negative relationship with them, we will also have a low quality of life but if we have an overall positive relationship with our friends, coworkers and neighbours, we will have better quality of life.

Sure, I can't argue with you there. But what does that have to do with us? I have generally a good relationship with my family and friends.

Let me continue. However the most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves. If the relationship with our self is that of disappointment, shame, hatred, or anger we will have a low quality of life, versus if the relationship with our self is based on love, caring, compassion, understanding and acceptance, we will have a pretty high quality of life.

I lost you. Explain that part again.

Let's say that there was something about yourself that you didn't like and resented. It could be the shape of your body, the size of your nose, your wrinkling skin, your greying

hair, your job, your salary, your shyness or me, or me, your pain. Let's assume you woke up every morning and looked in the mirror and hated that specific thing about yourself. You must admit if every day you thought about how much you hated and were angry at your body or your pain, it would not be a recipe for a good quality of life.

Of course I hate you, who in the right mind likes their pain?

I understand, but I'm not asking you to like or hate me. I am just asking you to accept me. Again imagine how much better your life and our relationship together would be if instead of being resentful or angry with me, you were kind, compassionate, caring and accepting of me.

Why would I possibly want to be caring and accepting of you? I don't ever wish to accept you. If I accept you that would mean that I've given up and that you'll stay with me for the rest of my life, and there's no way I can be accepting of that. So if that was your brilliant idea on how to fix our relationship, then I'm really seriously disappointed.

Oh no, let me clear up this misunderstanding. We all know that nothing stays the same and that everything changes. Accepting doesn't mean that that's the way it is always going to be. Acceptance means that you simply accept yourself and the way you are TODAY and at this moment. Acceptance has nothing to do with the future.

Here is the fact, when you finally become unconditionally accepting of your current self and most importantly accepting of me when I'm there with you, the paradox is that you will actually feel better.

That just doesn't make any sense to me. How could accepting you, when you've been such as pain in my life possibly make me feel any better? I can't give up fighting you.

That's the point, stop fighting me; obviously the constant battle you've chosen to take up with me isn't working for either of us. You are always upset and frustrated which makes me feel really unappreciated while here I am doing my best to actually help you. So I get myself closer to you hoping that you'll pay attention to me but you continue to resent me and fight me harder and so I've got no choice but to become more involved in your life. Now we're both stuck in this circle where I don't feel like I'm helping you because you keep pushing me away, so I try to cling harder to you. Do you see what I'm saying? Don't you want us to get out of this vicious cycle?

Of course I want out of this cycle. I am honestly tired of it. But I'm afraid that by accepting you, I will never get better and be back to my old self again.

Here is the paradox, the more accepting, kind and understanding you are of yourself today, the more likely that you are going change for the better tomorrow. You've been not accepting of me for a long time; why not try a different approach? What's the risk? Nothing... other than guaranteed that you will feel better about yourself... and the better you feel about yourself, I will feel a less of a need to be there to protect you.

Let me see if I heard you right. If I accept myself with or without you, you are more likely to leave me?

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. Even if I have to stick around because I feel the need to still protect you, you won't be bothered by me.

Seriously, there is chance that if I accept you, I won't be bothered by you?

Exactly... that is the definition of acceptance; you will be okay with me being with you when you finally realize that I am only here to assist you in your recovery. When you truly understand and appreciate that I'm actually good for you, you will no longer dislike me or be afraid of me, we can finally move forward.

This is all too much for me to handle, can we please take a break?

I agree. I certainly don't want to overwhelm you with all this information. I know it may be new to you and you'll need some time to process it. Tomorrow we can talk about how you can go about accepting me and giving me the type of attention that I seek. When you accept yourself and me, you'll no longer be fighting with yourself and believe me, life is so much better that way.

You're gradually convincing me with your crazy ideas. See you tomorrow. I look forward to it. Bye.

Door closes.

I can't believe I just told my pain that I look forward to seeing it tomorrow. What's going on?

Day 3

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. A positive relationship with yourself, your body and your pain will inevitably improve the quality of your life
2. A relationship with yourself, your body and your pain that is based on love, caring, compassion, understanding and acceptance may help reduce your nervous system hypersensitivity
3. The paradox is that you will actually feel better, when you practice self-compassion and become unconditionally accepting of your CURRENT self



Day 4: Hello I'm your pain... please be mindful of me

Knock on the door

I wonder who that could be?

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, It's me, your pain again... I hope you were expecting me.

As crazy as it sounds, I've been looking forward to you coming over. I actually had an epiphany after our last session when you told me that if I accept myself even if it is with you and no longer fight you, that I would feel better.

I actually tried that and as crazy as it sounds I am feeling a bit better about myself already.

Obviously you're still here so there's been no change in my actual pain, but you don't seem to... bother me as much.

What you're saying is music to my ears.

I just don't know what to do; you keep saying that I shouldn't push through pain and not ignore you. But what other options do I have?

We have all at some point since our childhood been told to push on, be tough and just ignore pain... and now even as grown adults, we still feel that we should tough it out and continue to have the mentality that I must push myself despite the pain.

If I don't push myself, then I must then be weak.

You must already realize, that the harder and harder you push yourself the worse and worse the pain becomes.

The more you deliberately ignore me, where I have the kindest of intentions to protect you, the less happy I will be with you.

So what, instead of ignoring you, I must constantly pay attention to you? I'm not gonna do that, that's terrible advice.

You must be mad if you think I'm interested in paying any MORE attention to you. You take up enough of mind and energy already.

I don't want more attention, but I do ask you to be more MINDFUL of me.

Be mindful of you? I'm not into this new age mindfulness stuff.

You don't need to be into anything but what you do need is an open mind.

Fine, I'm open to ideas.

Mindfulness is my first solution to improving our relationship. Mindfulness is accepting me, as your pain non-judgmentally WITHOUT trying to change me.

Mindfulness means that you are present and aware in whatever physical or emotional pain you may be feeling and experiencing.

Try this for just few minutes so you can see what I mean by being mindful of me.

Do I need to close my eyes for this?

It's ideal. So...

Meditation music

*Close your eyes, Breathe in and breathe out.
Keep going.*

*Now focus all your attention at the area of your body with the most discomfort ...
become fully aware of it.*

*Try to prevent any emotional reactions.
Try not to judge the sensation as good or bad.*

*Now experience the sensation by imagining that you are walking around it and looking
at it from every angle.*

*Try to be with it.
Letting go of any fear or dread or any difficult emotion associated with pain.*

*Look at it as if you're seeing it for the first time.
Breathing with the pain.*

Now experience the sensation by describing its characteristics.

*What shape is it?
Perfectly round or an unusual shape?
With smooth or rough edges?
Is it moving or in one spot?
Is it soft or tight?
Is it warm or cold?
Is it friendly? Is it scared?
And as odd as it sounds, give it a colour, what colour is it?*

Notice that you are gradually feeling less threatened by your pain... not fearful and not struggling with it.

*Just being there with it as you experience it. Making space for it... for now.
Notice it... be with it.*

Instead of resenting this sensation and emotionally reacting to it, accept it.

Acceptance doesn't mean you give up or give in, it means you accept the sensation as it is now at this moment and you're okay with it.

*You are accepting and okay with of whatever you are experiencing at this moment.
Decide that at this moment you are at peace.*

And life is nothing but a series of moments.

Focusing again on your breath. Breathe in and breathe out.

You may open your eyes again.

How do you feel now?

Really ...no difference.

That's great; your expectation with meditation should never be that you must feel instantly better... that would defeat the purpose of the meditation.

The aim of mindfulness practice is NOT to change or eliminate anything including your pain, but to understand it and be non-judgemental of it. The aim is to no longer judge your physical sensations as good or bad.

That sounds awfully hard. For so long I've thought of you as being only bad.

You bet it's hard. You've spend months or years of thinking that I, as your pain am awful. It's going to take more than one or two sessions of mindfulness to eventually become non-judgemental and accepting of me. Again I'm not asking you to like me.

Good, no offence, I doubt that I'm ever going to LIKE you, but I can certainly try to be more accepting of you.

All I want is to improve our relationship while we're here together.

Our relationship will improve when you become consistent with your non-judgemental approach to me, so practice the meditation daily... it may take a while... don't set a timeline. As each day is a new day.

I'm not too sure about this.

Think about it, what's the downside of doing this mindfulness practice? It costs nothing, has no side effects, it is relaxing and has the potential of dramatically improving our relationship. This is the only reason I'm here.

I think it's gonna take more than me closing my eyes and breathing to get better.

Big sigh... you are still missing the whole point, you don't WANT to keep thinking that you want to get better, just accept that now you already are everything that you need to be.

I know, this is a big change in thinking ...and it's going to take more than just a few minutes of meditation but it is start.

Do I have your permission to come over again tomorrow?

Sure, as you said. It is free and there is no side effect to being nice to you, so see you later. I'm just gonna go for a short walk cause at this moment I somehow feel less afraid of you. Bye

That's wonderful to hear.

Day 4

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The aim of mindfulness is to intentionally pay attention to the sensations in the body including the pain experience
2. Mindfulness means being non-judgemental about the experience
3. The aim of mindfulness is not change the actual pain experience, but to positively change the relationship with the experience and no longer be fearful or threatened by it



Day 5: Hello I'm your pain... you REALLY need pleasure

Knock on the door

I am quite sure I know who it is. It's amazing, I'm no longer terrified of opening the door worrying if it's pain.

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, it's me, your pain again... you must've been expecting me.

Yes, I was. But as strange as it sounds, I don't mind the fact that you're here. I honestly can't say that I like you, but we've reached a point in our relationship where you don't bother me as much.

You have no idea how happy I am to hear you say that. That really assures me that we are making progress here.

What do you want to talk about today?

Same thing, I know that I've repeatedly told you to not think about getting rid of me, as it just upsets me but I haven't yet told you what other options you have.

I thought being accepting and mindful of you was the only option I had.

That was just us starting... it usually takes more than one approach to improve a relationship.

Okay, let's hear it. But before you start, I can't help but blame you for taking a lot of the joy that I once had out of my life. Can you help me with that?

Sure, let's address that today. If you could have one wish today, what would you wish for?

That's a silly question. Obviously, I'd wish for having NO pain!

Sigh... The opposite of experiencing pain is not having no pain, but is experiencing pleasure.

Honestly, at this moment in my life, I don't care about experiencing pleasure; I just don't want to have any pain.

Once I stop having pain, only then I'll think about experiencing joy or pleasure.

Sadly it doesn't always work that way. The nervous system works in the opposite way. You need to focus on experiencing pleasure first so you give pain fewer reasons to stick around.

The alternative to getting rid of me is to look for ways of experiencing pleasure. The more pleasure you experience on a regular and daily basis, the more assured I will feel that you are in safety and the less you need my protection.

Basically, your pleasure is your best chance to feel better despite having me around. Also your pleasure will give me the best reason to voluntarily leave you. If you feel good, I don't need to be around as much...it's simple.

But how can I possibly feel good if you're always around... I feel like we're talking in circles.

Don't try so hard to kick me out as I'll just fight back. But try to give me reasons to leave by my own choice. I will ONLY leave when I think that you are in a good place, safe and secure.

So you're telling me that if I replace the obsession that I have for fighting you, with experiencing pleasure, I will feel better?

Of course.

What a stupid idea. How can I possibly enjoy my life in any shape or form if I am in pain? I can't go on a vacation or do the activities I used to love or even the errands around the house that I once enjoyed.

This is where I need to define pleasure to you. I know it sounds weird to have me, your pain tell you about how you can experience joy and pleasure.

There is certainly a bit of irony in that. Humour me, what do you possibly know about pleasure?

When you have a sudden injury, the first thing you need is pain to warn you to say...hey..listen, you've had injury...take care of it.

If you hit your shin against the coffee table, you don't say at that moment, wow, look at that beautiful sunset. The first thought in your head is, shit, that really hurts. Stupid coffee table, I gotta make sure I don't hit that stupid thing again.

When you stub your toes, you may right away say some profanity. You're natural reflex won't be to say, wow, I love the smell of the fresh bread that's baking in the oven. When you stub your toes, the only thing that matters at that time is to listen to the pain that your toes are experiencing.

When you have pain in your back, neck, shoulder, knee, wrist or jaw or wherever, same thing, the brain wants you to focus on the pain and certainly not on pleasure, which is a good thing to do ...for say a few minutes, hours or days in order to protect that part of the body to help it heal.

But what if pain sticks around for months or even years?

That's my point, after a few months, focusing just on the pain and eliminating pleasurable experiences from your life no longer serves a purpose but is in fact quite harmful to you.

So what do you want me to do?

Simple, I want you to experience joy and pleasure regularly throughout your day.

Now you're just being unrealistic.

Did you have you have a cup of coffee or tea this morning?

Yah, why?

Well, did you enjoy drinking it?

I don't know, I like having my morning hot drink; it's just a habit now.

I no longer want you to just drink your morning tea or coffee but to savour it and be mindful of the pleasure it is giving you.

You see, the pleasures I'm talking about don't have anything to do with going on trips or buying something expensive. The pleasures I am talking about involve the stuff that you're already doing in your day to day life; I simply want you to look at them differently and experience them more mindfully.

Did you go outside today?

Well just to the mailbox and back.

The next time you go, don't look at as just going to the mailbox, but an opportunity to experience looking at trees, different coloured leaves, perhaps the different shaped clouds in the sky. Listen for birds chirping or the sound of the snow or leaves under your feet as you walk.

Savour and breathe in the fresh outdoor air a few times and truly feel good doing it.

Let's do a short pleasure imagery.

Close your eyes

Breathe in and out comfortably do this a few times.

I want you to think about doing an activity that makes you feel good.

It should ideally be an activity that you can quite easily do.

It could be watching a movie with someone, or walking outdoors or listening to music or eating a tasty food or drink.

It can be anything you wish, it's your call.

Now smile and clearly see yourself doing the activity... keep smiling.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Think of the positive emotions that you associate with that activity... joy, relaxation, happiness, pleasure?

Breathe in, breathe out.

That actually felt good, although you're still here.

That's exactly what I want, for you to feel joy and pleasure, despite me being around.

Is that reeealy possible?

Of course it is, but it does take conscious effort, since it's not automatic.

Instead of always thinking of how to eliminate me from your life, start focusing on how you can add small daily pleasures into your life using all your 5 senses.

I don't know... it seems like all the things that I once enjoyed, I can't do anymore. I don't even remember what it's like to feel pleasure.

As crazy as it sounds, as your pain, I want to be a reminder for you to consciously experience pleasurable activities, cause that's the best way you can help me.

Remember I just want you to feel safe.

Here is a really great quote, *“The best pain relievers don’t come in a bottle but are out there found in small enjoyable experiences using our 5 senses.”*

Give me some examples cause I have no clue what you’re talking about.

You may start with truly experiencing the taste of something that you really enjoy.

Like my tea or an apple?

Exactly, just savour whatever you eat and consciously or even perhaps out loud say to yourself, mmm that tastes delicious and I’m really enjoying this.

Easy enough.

Then experience the scent of something that’s in your daily life that you find pleasing.

Like my soap, shampoo or a flower?

Yes.

But how long do I have to smell them for?

Oh, there’s no need to get caught up in how long to do any of these activities. Just experience them even it’s for a few seconds. What’s important is that at that moment you acknowledge that you are experiencing the pleasure of the scent of whatever it is you desire.

I can do that.

Then experience the touch or a hug of a pet, then experience the pleasure by listening to birds or 20 minutes of music that you enjoy... then experience looking at a tree, or clouds or a photo... and finally experience the pleasure of doing a physical activity that you enjoy, say walking.

Is this really going to work?

I don’t know what you mean by work? If your question is will consciously experiencing pleasures make you feel better, my answer is of course. Certainly you’ll feel better for that moment and life is nothing but a series of moments.

If I feel joy and pleasure, then will you leave me?

I don't want you to miss the point of all this. Don't do any of those things to get rid of me, as that again defeats the purpose. Put it this way, the more frequently I sense that you are feeling good about yourself, the more likely I am going to back off.

I leave, when I no longer feel needed. The more often you experience joy and feel safe in your life, the less reason I have to stay.

I have to say that this has been the most pleasurable conversation I've had with you. I've gotta feeling that I'm gonna have a good week.

You have no idea how much I want that for you.

Okay, good talk, I think I'm going to put headphones on and listen to some music.

See you tomorrow.

Sure, maybe yes, maybe no, but makes no difference to me now. I'm learning to be non-judgemental about you. It actually feels good. Bye.

Day 5

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. It is possible to experience pleasure despite the presence of pain
2. Experiencing pleasure is not automatic but takes conscious daily effort using the 5 senses
3. Small daily pleasurable experiences provide the nervous system with messages of safety, which can help reduce nervous system hypersensitivity



Day 6: Hello I'm your pain... try a little self-compassion

Knock on the door

I never thought I'd ever say these words. I'm going to open the door and invite pain in.

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, it's me, your pain again... I got good news.

There must be an irony somewhere in there, pain bringing me good news?

Seriously, today is a big day where I'm going to share with you a secret about me.

Oooh, I love secrets. It just sounds funny. My pain is going to tell me a secret.

But before I tell you this new idea, I want to review everything we've talked about so far.

I'm ok with a review.

Firstly, don't ignore me and push on, that just gets me more flustered as I want to be heard and noticed, so when I'm ignored...mm I don't like it. In fact it gets me irritated. If I don't want to be ignored, what do you think I want from you instead?

Maybe you want me to be mindful of you?

Exactly... and being mindful of me means that you acknowledge me.

How do I exactly acknowledge you again?

With your eyes open or closed, think of my exact location in your body, what my shape is, my movement, my colour, my mood, and that I'm nice...I mean no harm, I'm just the messenger.

Oh yes, I remember that meditation... it did make me feel more relaxed and less fearful of you.

...and you told me to not expect you to change just because I became more mindful of you.

You got it, the intention of being mindful of me isn't to get me to go away; but to show me that you acknowledge me, respect me, and that are willing to know more about me. Mindfulness is accepting your pain non-judgmentally WITHOUT trying to change it.

What did non-judgemental mean again?

It means you won't hate or dislike me ...or judge me as if I have bad intentions, cause I don't. Non-judgemental means that you are just mindful, aware and accepting of me at the present moment.

Ok, got it! I will do my best to no longer ignore you but be a lot more mindful of you whenever I can.

So from now on, are you going to be more accepting of me?... rather than constantly focus on getting rid of me?

Ooo, that's tough, but you did say that accepting you doesn't mean that I am inviting you to live with me, but that for this moment and for today, I am okay with you. Honestly the moment I remember and do that, I feel calmer as I'm not fighting you.

I guess I just don't really like the word acceptance.

Fair enough, let's then use a different word like mmm....self-compassion

I don't know what you mean by compassion.

Compassion is the desire to alleviate suffering and self-compassion is the desire to alleviate your own suffering by treating yourself the way you would treat someone you loved. Self-compassion means that you agree to be kind to yourself... that you treat yourself the way you would treat a really good friend whom you care for.

You show compassion towards other people when they're going through difficult times... but when it comes to yourself, you self-criticize and harshly judge yourself.

You're right...

Which you already know only adds to your suffering. I'm here to show you a way out.

Ahhh... I don't know what to think of all this.

Self-compassion simply means that you are caring and understanding of yourself even if it includes me, your pain.

You're just asking... too much from me...

It's simple, become aware and stop the self-criticism... and be okay with just the way you are.

I don't know about that. I think that when I criticize myself, then I am more motivated to change.

How has self-criticism worked out for you so far?

I guess it hasn't been effective, cause you're still around making me feel miserable.

Let's be clear, self inner-compassion won't eliminate me either but will help you understand me better... so that as your pain, I don't overwhelm you.

Perhaps if I wasn't so overwhelmed by you, I could focus more on all the other important things in my life.

You nailed it. If you're intentionally kind and supportive of yourself, you'll naturally have a greater sense of safety... and remember, the more safe you feel, the less reason I'll have, as your pain to stick around.

I don't know... the words inner or self-compassion still sounds kinda fluffy and weak.

It's actually the opposite, self-compassion makes you have more inner strength... and will help you become more resilient... cause then you won't fear failing by doing some of the activities that you've been avoiding.

Alright, you've convinced me... assume that I have self-compassion, acceptance, inner strength or whatever you want to call it. Now what?

When you're kind to yourself, you're then more likely to let yourself experience the small pleasures in life.

I think you'll be happy to know that I've been intentionally experiencing more small pleasures in my day to day life... I consciously savoured my morning coffee this morning and really enjoyed my short outdoor walk today.

Now you're talking...

When you came today, you had a secret that you wanted to share with me, tell me what is it?

I think I've given you enough to think about for the day, how about we wait till tomorrow to tell you the secret about me?

No way, I'm not letting you go... not until you at least give me a clue...

Okay, the secret is that any pain in your body is trying to communicate something with you... and it's your job to listen.

I can often offer you solutions to make you feel better.

Are you frigin serious? After all these months you've been with me, why haven't you told me?

You've never asked me, you've just been mostly angry at me. The secret is that if you just ask me genuinely ...and then patiently wait and listen, I'll reply with what I need in order to get you out of danger.

Great, that's easy enough; I'll do that now...

Hold on... it's not that easy, you have to communicate with me with an open mind.

So what do you need me to do? Tell me now and I'll do it.

Sorry, considering we've been together so long, it's not something that can be rushed. We will take our time and talk about it next time.

No please don't go now and leave me hanging like this...

(Speaking to self) Wait a minute, did I just tell my pain not to go? How bizarre!

I promise to teach you the secret about communicating with me on my next visit.

Fine, I'll accept your decision. In the meantime, I will try self-compassion... I think I'm going to make myself a cup of herbal tea, read a book and go to bed early tonight. Suddenly I feel like I want to be nice to myself and experience pleasure.

Bye.

Bye. I never thought that my pain wanted to actually communicate with me... how strange that I've obviously never listened.

Day 6

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. Ignoring pain may further irritate it, but being mindful of the discomfort may empower you to be less emotionally reactive to it
2. Self-compassion is the desire to reduce your own suffering by being accepting of your current self... this is associated with feeling more empowered
3. Whenever you experience any discomfort in a part of your body, it is your nervous system trying to communicate something to you... it is up to you to listen



Day 7: Hello I'm your pain... open the door and step outside

Knock on the door

I don't know what to think anymore, should I let my pain in?

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Knowing what I know, do I just open the door and allow it to freely come into my home and invade my space?

Knock on the door again...

(Muffled sound behind the door) Hello, it's your pain; would you like to let me in?

Can I just ignore the knock and move on with my life as if there's nothing that's knocking outside my door? But my pain was very clear when it said, "don't ignore me, I'm not gonna go away"

Knock on the door again...

(Continued muffled sound behind the door) Don't ignore me, I'm not just gonna go away

Oooo, I don't know what to do. I can just never open my front door again, ... pain can wait out there as long as it wants, I don't care... I'm quite comfortable in my own home.

Knock on the door again...

You have the choice of not opening the door for me to enter, and I'm perfectly OK with that. I know you are quite comfortable in your home now.

Just because you're knocking on my door, do I HAVE TO let you in?

No, you actually don't have to let me in.

Will you get upset if I just kept you outside my door?

Absolutely not; the only thing that matters to me is that you feel safe... and are you feeling safe now?

Mmmm, I guess so; I am in the comfort of my own home.

Well, as long as you're comfortable in your own home, you don't need to ever open your door for me ever again.

You mean I have that option?

Of course you have the option.

(Sigh of relief) That's amazing, after all this time you mean to tell me that I could have just not opened the door for you?

Yeah (with sarcasm)

So why don't I just never open my door for you again?

That would be perfectly okay with me, but there is a small tiny catch...

I knew there was a "catch" and that this all sounded too good to be true. So what's the catch?

Well, personally I would prefer it a lot more if you stayed within the comfort of your home for the rest of your life. That would be ideal for me. However, do you ALWAYS want to stay within the comfort of your home where you feel safe?

Yeah I would.

That's great news for me. I'll just be waiting right here outside your door and make sure that you always stay safe a secure. In fact I want you to think of me as your protective guard dog, I'm there right outside your door and will keep any intruders from ever entering the safety of your home again.

That is the most wonderful news. My pain is protecting me, just outside my door?

I'm happy to protect you as long as you just don't open the door.

Holly crap, I just realized what the catch to all this is. As long I stay in my home I'm okay but I'll eventually have to open up my front door and get out.

Hey... pain, are you still on the other side of the door?

Yes, what?

What if I want to go out for a walk?

Well then you obviously got to go through me first.

What if I want to go get groceries or run errands or hang out with friends or just exercise?

Duh, again, you gotta go through me first?

So you mean if I don't open the door for you, then I'm just trapped in my own home?

Well if you want to look at it that way, sure.

Well, what other way is there to look at it? Do you take me for a fool?

Not at all, but why do you think I've been politely knocking on your door before coming in? I always give you the choice of what you want to do when I'm outside your door. You can politely let me in and we can have a conversation so you can learn more about me or you can shut me out, keep the door closed, which is what you've typically done.

How has that worked out for you so far?

Well, actually not well... I've basically trapped myself in my own comfort zone.

And how is your comfort zone?

The sad part is that my so called comfort zone is shrinking day by day and it doesn't actually feel so comfortable at all.

Although I'm outside your door most of the time, I can still easily get in and seep through underneath the door, no matter how much you lock your door to keep me away.

Now I know why... you jerk... you've been seeping through underneath my door even though I tried to put locks and bolts on my door to keep you out.

Unfortunately locks and bolts don't do much to keep me out.

So just when I felt at least safe in my own little house, you invaded my space there. So sometimes I just lock myself in my room hoping to escape from you.

I'm not technically intruding in your home, as I'm just coming in to make sure that you're safe... but then when lock yourself in your room, I seep underneath your bedroom door also to make sure that you're safe.

You little piece of shit, you sneak up on me, in my own bedroom, while I'm sleeping?

Sure, I always gotta make sure that you're safe.

So you mean, no matter what I do and how much I lock myself up and trap myself, you will always be there?

Technically... yes, I only leave when I feel that you are safe both physically and emotionally.

If you can just barge into my home or my room anytime you want, then why do you bother knocking?

You must know why I've come knocking on your door every day?

Yeah... so you could come in and communicate with me?

Well that's one reason, the other reason I have you open the door for me is so you realize that you also have the option of leaving through your front door. Every time you open the door, I've given you an opportunity to leave the safety of your own home and explore things that are out there. The choice is yours.

Knock on the door again...

You know what? I'm not afraid of opening the door to you. I'm going to open the door now but not to let you in, but to leave. I feel like going for a walk, you can come along if you wish. From now on, I choose to open the door and go out more often. Knowing for well that you're always outside the door.

Knock on the door again...

Go ahead open the door and just take a small step outside. The more often you take tiny steps outside your comfort zone, the better it makes me feel.

The more often you feel in control, the less reason you give me to be waiting and on guard outside your door.

You know what? I no longer wish to be trapped and imprisoned in my own home. I want to have the freedom to go in and out of my home whenever I wish.

Yes, but you gotta go through me first.

Perhaps we can go for walk together and we can talk about it?

I agree, we might as well talk while walking... let's go for that walk together.

Sound fades away as they walk away

So how long of a walk do you want to do?

I don't know... does it matter?

You could 10 steps or 10 kilometers...

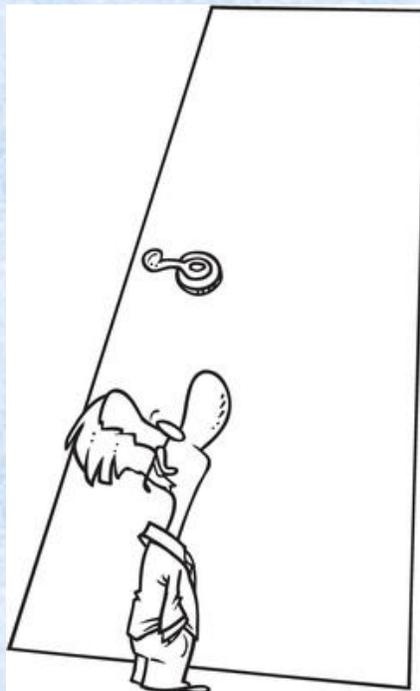
Why don't we just see how it goes...

In the meantime let me tell you.... **(Fade away)**

Day 7

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. Attempting to always stay within your “*comfort zone*” may result in the gradual shrinkage in the size of the zone... it is not a long term solution
2. Prolonged avoidance of activities or movement that increase pain or feared to increase pain may result in feeling “trapped” and sensing a loss of control
3. Daily gradual exposure to activities once feared and avoided will result in feeling greater “safety” both physically and emotionally.



Day 8: Hello I'm your pain... fear is why I'm hanging around

Knock on the door

Maybe I should just leave my door open.

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, it's me, your pain...

So, what brings you around today?

There's only one reason I am here, I only come when I feel the need to communicate something with you... and it's your job to listen.

I'm listening.

Before we begin, you need to know that I always come to warn you about an actual danger now or warn you of a possible danger in the future.

So what kind of danger am I in? Just tell me and we can move forward. I'm tired of playing this game.

Sometimes knowing the danger is really easy, like if you put your hand on a hot stovetop, your pain will tell you to remove it... or if you've had surgery, pain will tell you to limit your activities until you heal... or you twist your ankle your pain will tell you to not walk on it for a few days.

Sure if I had had a recent injury or surgery, the reason for my pain would be obvious... but what about now? I had my injury a long time ago and I've been told that everything is healed and yet I am still stuck with you.

Sometimes pain lasts well after everything is healed because I obviously still sense that you're in some kind of danger.

Look around you, obviously there's nothing dangerous around me, so why won't you just leave me alone?

As I said, some signs of danger are obvious like a hot stovetop, stepping on a nail, a broken leg or kidney stones. But many times the signs of danger are much less obvious and it takes time to figure things out.

So why do you think I'm in danger? I haven't had any recent injuries, my blood works are normal; the doctors can't find anything in the tests. I've seen different healthcare providers and they haven't been able to help me, yet you keep knocking on my door? I'm frankly getting frustrated.

Just be honest with me... why are you here?

Woh, slow down a bit, I never said figuring out the dangers was easy to do, plus most often it's not just one thing, but a combination of things.

I don't even know what you're talking about, a combination of what things? What makes you feel that I am in danger?

I can tell you at least 10 things that potentially make me feel that you're in danger.

Just tell me one.

Okay, do you have a fear of hurting yourself and making your pain worse?

Obviously, considering what I've gone through, of course I fear hurting myself again. I've been told by so many different doctors and therapists to avoid this and that and I've also searched the internet and learnt that I should stop some of my activities.

I don't want to hurt myself anymore... I have enough problems already.

Do you ever worry or have fears of not recovering?

Of course I do.

Your fears are understandable but most often not justified. The problem with fear is that it results in you experiencing even more pain.

How? I am trying to avoid pain, that's why I'm afraid.

Yeah but fear makes me go into overdrive in order to protect you. Fear of pain or fear of not ever recovering is what drives me to stay close to you.

What am I then supposed to do? I'm just following instructions.

The first thing is... stop your internet searches... you can get overwhelmed and confused, which likely just adds to your fears about your condition.

I search on the web hoping to find some answers that may have been missed by my doctors.

How has your search gone so far? How do you feel after reading stuff or watching random stuff about your condition on the web?

Now that you tell me... honestly, I feel horrible after I do it.

The other thing I suggest is that you find yourself a healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about me and those dealing with pain for a long time.

How do I know who is knowledgeable? I just assume all doctors and therapists know how to help people with pain.

Do this, the next you see a healthcare provider, tell them *“I no longer want you to fix my pain, but from now on, I want you to show me, what I can do for myself to become more active again.”*

If they get all confused by your suggestion and not know how to help you, then I suggest you find someone else.

My doctor only gives me medications for my pain and my therapist put machines on me, needles me, and does some hands on stuff promising to fix me... and I just keep going and hoping that they'll one day work.

How is that going for you so far?

They at least get rid of you temporarily, but as usual you just come back, knocking on my door. What else can I do?

Obviously what they're doing for you now, isn't effective cause I continue to feel like you're in danger.

You need a healthcare provider who can empower you, guide and coach you about all the things that YOU can do for yourself and feel safe again.

What you don't need is people telling you all the things that are wrong with you, which only causes you to have more fear and gives me more reason to stick around.

I'm so confused now... I don't know what to do. You're telling me to not be afraid, but that seems impossible.

It's hard, but not impossible. You need a healthcare provider who makes it their priority to REDUCE your fears about your condition and your fear of not recovering. The next time you leave your doctors or therapist's office, simply ask yourself, *“Do I feel more assured and confident in my recovery?”*

If the answer is no, then you're not currently on the right path.

You're right, even though my pain sometimes feels better after taking medications or after getting therapy, I don't really feel more confident about my recovery.

Just imagine how much less fear you would have if the people you saw focused on all the things that you could still do and were able to lessen your fear by getting you to move closer to all your desired activity goals.

You know what, you're absolutely right. I don't want to be afraid anymore. First, I am going to stop searching on the web... but do I have to completely stop going on the internet?

No, just avoid reading things about your condition. You can still watch funny cat videos that make you laugh, that's actually good for me.

I'm also seeing my doctor and my therapist today and I am going to walk right in there and tell 'em, "I no longer want you to fix my pain, but from now on, I want you to show me, what I can do for myself to become more active again."

It sounds like you're a bit more confident already.

I AM actually; it's time I took matters into my own hand... instead of relying on others to "fix" me. I'm tired of being made to feel like I'm broken. I want to finally be in charge of my own recovery.

Well it looks like my work here is soon gonna end.

Thanks, this was a very eye opening session today. It's time I found a healthcare provider who knows about pain... at least as much as I do now, thanks to you.

I think this communication stuff is paying off. Bye for now...

Bye.

Day 8

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. Fear increases the hypersensitivity of the nervous system and the potential pain experience
2. The next you see a healthcare provider, tell them *“I no longer want you to fix my pain, but from now on, I want you to show me, what I can do for myself to become more active again.”*
3. Fear of condition may be reduced by seeing the RIGHT healthcare provider and seriously avoiding random internet searches on “pain”



Day 9: Hello I'm your pain... I need air and sense you're in control

Knock on the door

Not many people knock at my door, so I can pretty much predict who's on the other side.

Walks to the door and the door is opened

Hello, it's me your pain.

Welcome in, have a seat. Would you like me get you something? How may I serve you today?

Woh, I am not used to this kind of treatment.

Well, you've been coming here for a while now and you keep telling me how I gotta be nice to you instead of angry, so here I am, doing my best to be nice to you.

I have to confess, I really like the new you. From the moment I've walked in the door you seem like you're in *control* instead of in a state of panic that I used to sense when you used to open the door or me.

Well that was the old me and this is the new me. I also like the new me; it feels like I am more in control rather than having you control me.

Tell me a bit more.

I mean look, I allowed you to come in without resisting you, so I feel like I am in charge. I used to look at how you were invading my space, but now that I am allowing you to exist in my space, I am obviously in control!

Do you realize how much that means to me? I WANT you to feel in control. I am an experience that lives within your body and mind and as you know I am a part of you, so I only come here in peace and not mean any harm.

That's right, knowing that you are on my side has given me comfort. Is there something I can help you with today?

I am again, very impressed by the new you and the way you are treating me. It is the first time that you have directly offered to help me.

Thanks

Can you do me one small favour?

Sure.

Instead of calling me your pain, can you come call me by another name from now on?

Why?

The thinking is that if you call me by another name, then I become less threatening to you. The less threatening I am to you, the calmer your nervous system will become.

Sure, what do you want me to call you from now on?

Call me by a name that is humorous to you, like a cartoon or a movie character or any name that you like. That way, when you refer to me from now on or talk about me to others, I will be more of a friend rather than an enemy.

I promise to come up with a nice name for you... may I call you *my friend* for now?

Sure.

Hello *my friend*, is there something I can help you with today?

As you're pain and as your friend, I've come to you all this time in a desperate need of your help and to finally have you directly offer to help me, has frankly taken the burden of the world off my shoulders. This means the world to me.

Thank you. I regret for having mistreated you in the past. Can we have a fresh start?

Of course we can have a fresh start.

Then let me ask you again *my friend*, how may I serve you today?

First, I would like you to assure me that you are not in any danger.

I assure you that I am not in any imminent danger. I've seen my doctor and have had multiple tests and they've concluded that I am safe.

Ok, well that's a relief. But are you sure you're doctors aren't missing anything?

Well, I've been going to physical therapy for many weeks now and they are also assuring me that is safe for me to move, exercise and gradually do some of my life activities.

Alright then, that does give me some relief.

Again, how may I serve you today?

As long as you don't need urgent care or immediate medical attention, you may serve me seven simple things.

Seven simple things coming up, I am at your service. Just tell me what they are, so we can get started.

- 1) I need air
- 2) I need adequate water
- 3) I need adequate nutrition
- 4) I need adequate sleep
- 5) I need adequate amount of sun and vitamin D
- 6) I need you to experience positive social connections

That's it.

You just said you needed seven things. So what's the 7th one?

The 7th thing I need is actually not from me, but for yourself.

So tell me what is it? I understand you needing, air, water, nutrition, sleep, sun and social connections, but what else could be more important than those 6?

What is more important to me is to sense that you have a sense of purpose.

Of course I have a sense of purpose; my most important purpose now is to get rid of you.

The sense of purpose and the goals that I need from you... cannot be about me.

You have any idea how hard it is to set goals? When sometimes I just don't even feel like getting out of bed. Can we start with something simpler? How may I serve you today?

Okay, on top of the list... I need is air, meaning oxygen.

A few doses of breaths, coming right up. How many would you like?

I'll take a lifetime supply please.

How would you like me to serve that air to you?

You could offer them to me slowly using controlled mindful breaths, or rapidly by exercising. I don't honestly care how I get the air as long as I feel that YOU are in control of the breaths.

I'm breathing now, is that not enough for you? How do you exactly wish me to show you that I AM in control?

It can be while you sit there and calmly meditate or by you going for daily brisk walks. Air is air, a breath is a breath, but again what matters to me the most is that I have to feel that YOU are in control of the breath.

I'm sorry, but do I ever serve you breaths where you don't feel that I am in control?

Actually all day, I don't sense that you feel like you're in control. You are more reactive than proactive.

I don't understand what you mean.

Breathing while experiencing, fear, anxiety or stress, of course still gives your body the air that it needs to survive, but it's not air with a sense of control. When I sense that you are not in control of the air I'm receiving, I get stressed, which makes you stressed which again makes me feel more stressed.

Then how can I assure you now and prove to you that I AM in control of the oxygen that I am serving you?

You could just sit and calmly and consciously breathe a few times a day to assure me that you're in CONTROL.

I can certainly do that. I guess that's why so many people are telling me to try mindfulness meditation.

As your pain and your friend, I don't care what you call it. I just need you to sense that YOU are in control of your life and one of the fundamental things that you can control in your life is your breath.

I guess so.

Breathing is the only vital function that you have immediate control over. Think of it, you can't control your heart, kidney or liver on demand; you can't stop them or speed them up when you feel like it. All these organs work in your body without you giving them a second thought.

Okay...

In other words, they work automatically to keep you alive whether you're sleeping or awake. You don't have instant and conscious control over them, however when it comes to your breathing, you do!

I never thought of it that way. Breathing is fully automatic... and amazingly I breathe as much as I need... my body knows exactly how much oxygen to give me.

But what makes your breath different, is that you have the power to instantly and consciously override this automatic mode, if you choose to.

I guess so.

Go ahead breathe in right now as I count to 3. Inhale, 1-2-3 now pause your breath for a count of 3, 1-2-3. Now slowly exhale on a count of 3, 1-2-3. How did that feel?

Honestly?

Yeah honestly.

Well nothing. I just held my breath for 3 seconds, what's the big deal?

The big deal is that you had CONTROL over that ONE specific breath. You had CONTROL in how long you took to inhale and how long you held it in and how long you exhaled.

I still don't get what the big deal is.

Do you feel any different after that one controlled breath?

I already said it, I feel no different.

I didn't expect you to feel different, but I as your pain and the one who is sensing danger, I became just a little more assured that you are in control... even it was for just that one breath.

Huh?

Don't you get it? It's not about the breath; your conscious control over that one breath is symbolic that you still have control over your life.

I have to admit, since you've come into my life, I no longer fully enjoy it as you're now controlling what I do during my day and sadly sometimes even at nights as I lay awake. Since you've come around, I have certainly felt as if I have less control over my life.

The sad part is that the more I feel that you are not in control of your life, the more I sense that you are in danger and I become more hypervigilant to protect you.

So you mean, by consciously breathing I can make you feel like I am in control of my life? At least to some degree?

Your breath is not only symbolic of your life, it IS your life. When the breath stops being, you stop being.

Ok, no need to get morbid on me. I got quite a few more breaths to go, thank you very much.

I know that... and I just occasionally want you to show me that you have control over a few of them rather always be on automatic mode.

Is meditation the only way for me to show you that I'm in control of my breaths?

Mindful breathing is just one way. You could also choose to do a physical activity that increases your heart rate and your breathing.

Like what?

I don't really care what you do; it could be brisk walking or playing tennis or swimming or even laughing. Go ahead laugh right now. Let's both do it for a few seconds.

Hahahahahaha hahahahaha

You just showed me again that you were in control of your breath.

So whenever I ask you, how may I serve you today? Your first reply will likely be to serve you oxygen by breathing in air.

Remember, not just any air?

Yeah I know; you want air that makes you feel that I am in control.

You got it.

And I can serve it to you in the form of mindfulness breathing or by going for a short walk or by lifting weights and exercising or by laughter.

As for the exercise, you may need to see a physical therapist to help you with deciding which activities and movements are ideal for you.

I'm really loving this new relationship we have together, where I am no longer fighting you, but working with you to see how we can get along better.

I agree, life is so much better this way. That's enough for today. I'll talk about my other 6 needs later on, cause I don't want to overwhelm you.

I think I'm going to sit still for 5 minutes and mindfully breathe, then I'll go for my walk, then I'm going to ask for a friend to come over so we can have some laughs together or perhaps even watch a funny show.

Sounds like you are finally gaining control, and I really appreciate it. Talk to you later. Bye.

Bye *friend*. I'm going to sit here for a few minutes and feel in control of my breaths.

Day 9

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves to have you feel that you are in CONTROL; if it lacks that sense of control it is more likely to become sensitive
2. One way to increase the sense of control is by becoming consciously aware of a few breaths, either through meditation, exercise or laughter
3. Refer to your pain by another name that may even make you smile; this may be another simple way of perceiving that you have control over the pain experience



Day 10: Hello I'm your pain... I need water

Knock on the door

I won't even bother asking who it is. Come in!

Hello, it's me your pain.

Remember, I'm not going to call you my pain anymore, you're *my friend* and I've given you a nice first name. I've been expecting you. How may I serve you today?

I am so impressed by your kindness towards me. I already feel more relaxed. I remember how you used to treat me. Your new approach to me is very much noticed and appreciated.

I read a quote by Dalai Lama who said, "*Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.*"

Appreciate it.

I used to believe that it was impossible to be kind to my pain, I was wrong, now I know that it is possible. In fact I can be kind to others, but I can also be kind to myself, my body and most importantly to you, my pain.

Stop it, you're making me blush.

And to show you my genuine kindness, every time you show up I shall directly and repeatedly ask you. How may I serve you today?

You already know my first answer; I need you to serve me oxygen by breathing in air.

And not just any old air, but air that comes to you with my conscious controlled breaths or through exercise or by laughter.

You got it.

And I've done my best to offer you that every day.

And I thank you for it.

What else can I do to serve you today?

The second thing I need is adequate hydration or just water.

Easy enough, how much water do you want or need? I'll drink it right now.

There's no specific amount of water, but just some water every day.

I need a more clear answer from you. Do you want me to drink 2 cups of water a day or 10 cups? Just tell me and I'll do it.

Remember what was important to me about the breaths that you took? I needed to feel that you were in CONTROL. The same thing goes for your drinking.

So let me make sure I got this, you want me to consciously drink and feel in control of my drinking?

Yes.

So does it matter what I drink?

It actually does. Remember that I want you to be kind to yourself. If you had a dear friend or a pet that was ill and they needed to be as healthy as possible to recover, what drink would you offer them to help them get well?

I don't know... I'm not a doctor.

Would you offer them a lot of alcohol or caffeinated drinks?

They would probably not be my first choice if I wanted to help my friend or my pet.

Would you offer them a sugary drink like a pop or orange juice?

May be?

Just so you know, refined sugar is a stimulant and sometimes inflammatory and in case you forgot, the reason I'm here is that you have a hypersensitive nervous system. Sugary drinks, excessive caffeine or alcohol may cause me to become even more stimulated, which I'm sure is not something you want.

I definitely don't need my pain to be more stimulated. Can I at least enjoy my one cup of coffee in the mornings and my occasional glass of wine in the evenings?

Let me ask you this, would you be okay with your friend whom you dearly love and you're trying to help, enjoy their cup of coffee or tea and their glass of wine?

Yeah I would. As long as it's one drink that's not excessive.

I agree. The only thing I ask is that when you drink that cup of tea, coffee or your glass of wine or one beer, is that you savour it, feel in control and truly enjoy it. Not just gulp it down.

Got it... again, how may I serve you today?

Please keep me properly hydrated, ideally with just water. However if you wish to enjoy a cup of coffee, tea or a glass of wine, be my guest. But please avoid the sugary drinks, especially the ones with artificial sweeteners. I really don't do well with them.

It's a deal. I'm going to pour myself and *my friend*, who is you, a cup of herbal tea and mindfully drink it now, and I hope that will please you.

It certainly will. I got air and water so far. We only got 5 more to go!

Bye.

Bye.

Day 10

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves adequate hydration
2. Limit caffeinated, sugary and alcoholic drinks as they may increase nervous system hypersensitivity, which may contribute to the pain experience
3. The ideal hydration is plain water or non-caffeinated teas that are consumed with conscious awareness



Day 11: Hello I'm your pain... I need proper nutrition

Knock on the door

Come in *my friend* and make yourself comfortable.

You realize... it's me your pain.

Yeah, I know that, again make yourself comfortable and stay as long as you feel the need to. I'm here for you.

Your kindness is greatly appreciated. I truly feel like we're finally moving forward.

I agree. I am not as threatened by you anymore. Tell me, how may I serve you today?

You've offered me your breaths, proper hydration and today I ask for the third most important thing for your survival.

I can't remember, what is the third thing that I can serve you today?

Proper nutrition... and ideally not just today, but every day.

Well that's easy, I eat every day. But is there any special diet that you want?

The most important thing for me is for you eat well.

I think I eat well. How do you define well?

The truth is that proper nutrition is different for everyone. If you have diabetes or specific digestive health issues, I suggest you consult a dietician who is knowledgeable about the link between pain and diet.

What do you want me to eat? Can you please just be straight forward with me? I'll go on any diet if it means I can feel better.

No, I can't be straight forward with you. All I can tell you is that eating should be an enjoyable activity and certainly not stressful.

You're right... I am often stressed about my weight and my cravings. I eat certain foods, and then I feel guilty and bad about myself. When I feel sad or if I'm stressed, I again tend to make poor food choices.

I understand that.

But I still don't get what does what I eat have anything to do with you, my pain?

You know that I am a result of your hypersensitive nervous system, right?

Yes I know.

And your nervous system relies on proper nutrition with the right vitamins and minerals to stay healthy. If your sensitive nervous system feels that it's not getting adequate nutrition, it becomes even more sensitive.

I certainly don't want that... so should I be taking supplements?

I'm not saying that. It is best to get your nutrition from food rather than pills, but if it's recommended by your doctor, of course you should take supplements for any deficiencies you may have, such as vitamin D, iron or B12 but you need a blood test first.

I am taking magnesium citrate and that seems to help my muscle tension and my sleep.

Magnesium powder may sometimes help so it's worth a try for a few weeks; again, consult a healthcare provider such as a pharmacist about that. Just so you know leafy green vegetables also have magnesium.

Should I then go on a special diet? I also need to lose weight.

Please don't even use the word diet in front of me again, as it causes me stress, and stress makes me more sensitive. Dieting is part of the problem and not the solution.

I'm confused, what am I supposed to do? Should I not focus on losing weight? I feel so bad about myself as I've been told that if I only lost weight I could feel better.

First of all fad diets at best work temporary and at worst lead to binge eating and an obsessive unhealthy relationship with food.

Many people especially at times of stress are obsessed with food and their body. Either they over-eat or under-eat... and neither is obviously healthy for the mind or the body.

I'm sooo confused now, how am I supposed to know what to eat or how much to eat?

Eat food simply when your body tells you when you need to eat food. I am certain you know the difference between eating when you're actually hungry versus eating when you are just stressed, sad or craving. Just be honest with yourself.

So I should only eat when I'm hungry.

You should breathe when you feel you need to breathe, you should drink when you're thirsty and you should eat when your body tells you to eat and you feel hungry, it's not that complicated.

I don't know about that? I always feel hungry. Then I'd be eating all the time.

Whenever you eat, just ask yourself, *"Am I eating because I am hungry or because of my emotions?"*

What if it is truly because I'm hungry?

Then before you eat a food or drink, ask yourself, *"How is this going to make me feel? How will this impact my pain?"*

You will likely know the answer. You already know that high sugary, salty and processed foods are often highly addictive... other than the instant gratification... they don't make you feel better.

On the other hand, not many get addicted to whole fruits, vegetables, beans, or lentils. Have you ever said this?... *"I'm really craving some steamed broccoli and lentil soup."*

It's not easy avoiding the foods I crave.

I know, so for now just be more mindful of how certain foods make you feel, that's all.

I don't really eat and think about how it's going to make me feel, but I admit I do think about how certain foods are going to make me gain weight. Which makes me feel bad... but I do it anyways.

From now on focus on eating based on how it is going to make you feel that day rather than how it is going to make you look in the future.

But everyone talks about eating less, fasting and dieting.

Fasting for a whole day or even a few hours can be beneficial for some, but again you need to see a dietician for that.

Don't we need breakfast, lunch and dinner and a few snacks in between?

The truth is that the 3 meals a day is made up and is cultural and habitual rather than physiological. If you ate just one or two proper meals a day without snacking in between, you may actually feel better.

How?

Well it's all about giving your digestive system, your gall bladder, your liver your pancreas that makes insulin a break. When you snack, eat 3 meals and have sugary drinks throughout the day, they are constantly working, all day and night, 7 days a week. If you walked all day and night, would you not want to give your feet a few hours break?

Sure I would.

Think of fasting as just giving your body a well deserved break... but again you must talk to your doctor and a dietician about that, especially if you have any health conditions such as diabetes.

Fasting seems awfully hard. Couldn't I just eat less but eat more frequently?

Fasting may actually be easier, as you know that you will not eat or drink anything other than water for a set period of time.

On the other hand constant calorie counting and focusing on eating less with every meal and portioning snacks is frankly exhausting.

When you repeatedly deprive yourself, you become obsessed. Think of it, if you deprive yourself of sleep, your nervous system will constantly want you to sleep and will send signals to your body to sleep.

Okay.

If you deprive yourself of oxygen by holding your breath for a while, your nervous system will take over and does everything in its power to have you breathe again. You can't fight it as you just can't beat your nervous system. It will eventually force you to breathe, sleep, and eat.

Sure, that makes sense.

However when it comes to eating, when you sense that you are deprived, the nervous system makes poor choices. When you restrict yourself of foods, your nervous system will naturally obsess over food.

You're right; I do often obsess over food.

And how is that going?

Not well!

If your nervous system senses that you are lacking in food and nutrition, as your pain I get signals that you are in potential danger and it doesn't matter what part of your body is in pain, I become more sensitive.

So if I eat a lot of food, then you will become less sensitive?

No, I need to sense that you are eating nutritious foods. It's not about the quantity... it's only about the quality and nutritional value of the food. If you eat foods that are of low nutritional value, like most fast foods or pre-packaged foods, even if it satisfies your hunger, your nervous system will still feel deprived of nutrition and sense danger, which will make me more sensitive.

I'm so confused, how do you want me to eat. Just be honest.

I want you to feed yourself in a loving a respectful way where YOU are in control.

What do you mean by feeding myself in a loving way?

You already intuitively know what is naturally good for your body. Be honest, if you were feeding a dear friend, how would you be feeding them right now? Especially if you knew that the friend had a sensitive nervous system and was experiencing pain.

You're right, if I were feeding someone whom I loved, I would make sure that they only ate nutritionally rich foods such as a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes that would help them in their recovery.

Learn to treat your body respectfully and make peace with whatever your body is going to be as a result.

You don't want me to worry about my weight?

When you focus so much on food and body size, you may sadly sometimes miss out on life... it takes a lot of mental energy to obsess over food. If you change your relationship with food you have a greater capacity to go for walks, take up a new hobby, or hang out with friends.

If only I was just happy with my body, I wouldn't obsess so much over food.

You can be happy with your body now. There is no need to wait. The more accepting you are of yourself TODAY, the more likely you are going to positively change.

I think I get it. The more I feel bad about my body, the worse I eat. So what you're saying is that if I was kind and accepting of myself, then I would actually eat better.

Yes, so once you truly accept yourself, you will effortlessly eat better and easily limit your sugar and processed foods.

If I saw a dietician and had a perfect diet, then you'd go away?

Remember there were seven things I needed, so proper nutrition is certainly one of the seven pieces of the puzzle.

All right, you've convinced me, I am going to look into fasting starting with only a few hours, eat nutritious foods whenever I feel hungry and will ask myself, "how is this going to make me feel today?"

Great, but the truth is that I am not just concerned about what you eat, but also on how you eat.

I don't get what you're saying.

Just be conscious when and how you are eating. For instance, avoid eating mindlessly by being on your phone or while watching TV.

Isn't everybody guilty of that?

Yes, many are, but that doesn't make it right. Just devote time to eat... not be rushed or multi-task. If I could give one piece of advice, that would be to eat SLOWLY and mindfully and taste every bite. Feel in control of every bite.

There you go again. You really want me to feel like I am in control.

Absolutely.

All right, I am going to cook my favourite recipe today using fresh ingredients, vegetables, and herbs... and before I eat it, I am going to ask myself 3 questions.

“Am I eating mindfully?”

“Do I feel in control of what I am eating?”

“How is this going to make me feel today?”

The next time you ask me, *“How may I serve you?”*

I will say, *“I want air, water and proper nutrition please.”*

Sure thing, my friend.

I’ll come by tomorrow?

If you feel the need.

We just have to wait and see, and we’ll take it one day at a time.

Day 11

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves proper nutrition and if it senses it is lacking proper nutrition, it will increase stress on the body which can increase nervous system hypersensitivity
2. Avoid diets that focus on weight-loss by eliminating foods and making you always feel deprived... instead, focus on adding nutritious foods to your diet that make you feel you are in control
3. Before eating ask any of these questions...
“Am I eating because I am hungry or because of my emotions?”
“Am I eating mindfully?”
“Do I feel in control of what I am eating?”
“How is this going to make me feel today?”



Day 12: Hello I'm your pain... I need restful sleep

Knock on the door

I'm so tired today; I don't even feel like opening the door.

Knock on the door

(Tired voice) Just open the door and come in.

Hello, it's me your pain. You sound tired today.

That's because I'm totally exhausted. I've been having trouble sleeping lately... and even when I fall asleep, I wake up easily. When I finally have to get out of bed, I feel like going back to bed again.

I'm sorry to hear that. What kept you up?

Are you serious? YOU kept me up. Anyhow, you're here now and it's daytime. (Yawn)
How may I serve you today?

I must admit that you've been very kind to me for the past little while. You've been serving me air by taking in slow controlled breaths and you've been exercising to get your heart rate up.

Yes I have been.

You've also been drinking more water and limited all your sugary drinks, especially first thing in the morning.

Yes I have been.

You've also been more kind to yourself while eating,

Yes, I've been eating more fruits and vegetables and have mostly been cooking my own meals... that way I know what's going into my food.

I am truly grateful for your help so far.

You're welcome. How would you like me to serve you today?

I think it is time that we talked about you getting some restful sleep.

I am afraid that I may not concentrate too well today, cause honestly I am so tired and feel like my brain is foggy.

I understand, so we will keep it short today.

I would love to offer you better sleep, but it seems like it's beyond my control. I've done everything, but nothing's really worked so far. My doctor even prescribed some medications to help me sleep, and they work but I am afraid of getting dependent on them. So I limit them. I've also gone to a sleep clinic and they said that I don't have sleep apnea.

Glad to hear that you've even gone to a sleep clinic and have ruled out sleep apnea, cause that's really important. Therefore, as your pain, here are my top 5 suggestions for getting a better night's sleep.

I'm all ears.

One, have a regular going to bed and wake up time. We are all creatures of habit and your body clock needs predictable going to bed and wake up times.

What if I'm too tired to get out of bed or can I sleep in on the weekends?

Again, the more predictable you are, the calmer your nervous system will be. When your sleep schedule is unpredictable, it causes your nervous system to feel stressed and I become more sensitive.

Okay, I will do my best to go to bed and get out of bed at the same time every night. What else can I do?

The second advice I have is to do some physical activity every day. That could be going for a walk, lift weights, Yoga, Qigong... or anything. Most nights you're just mentally tired, but you also need to be physically tired in order to fall into a deep asleep.

Sometimes I exercise and I still can't fall asleep.

Just because you exercised for the day, doesn't necessarily mean that you'll sleep well that night, it's cumulative. Meaning it takes a few months of physical activity to help improve your sleep, so be patient.

I was hoping for a magic cure. Okay, I will have a routine going to bed and wake up time, and I will go for walks every day, what else?

Just make sure that you go outside every day so your body can experience some daylight.

You're right; I am home most of the day.

And sadly the artificial lights in the office or the home are not at all similar to real sunlight. Your body needs to experience daytime and real daylight in order to get into the rhythm of being awake during the day and sleeping during the night.

That makes sense. I promise to go out every day and go for a walk and just sit on a park bench; and if I can't for some reason, I'll sit in my balcony. What's the fourth thing for getting me to sleep better?

Avoid being on your phone, computer or any screen an hour before going to bed.

Oh, that's gonna be tough. What am I supposed to do an hour before going to bed?

All I know is that checking emails, watching news, looking at the bright light of the TV or tablet are not helpful for going to sleep. If you have trouble sleeping, then you ideally should do something non-stimulating such as listening to relaxing music on headphones, meditate, or read a boring book using a night light. You get the point. Also don't do any of those relaxing activities actually in your bed. You want lying in your bed associated only with sleeping not with reading or being on your phone.

I guess I can stay off my phone for an hour before going to bed. What's your last suggestion?

You need to feel in control on your life stresses. If you feel that thoughts and worries are keeping you up at night, then at some point, the hour before going to bed, write them down on a piece of paper. Write down the stuff that you're worried or stressed about and come up with possible solutions moving forward.

It's important for you to feel that you're in control before going to bed and writing things down is sometimes a good way of doing it.

How long do I write for?

Just start writing and see how it goes, there's no rule.

OK. When you came here today, I asked you, "*How may I serve you?*" and you said that you could use some restful sleep.

Yes, the less you sleep, the more sensitive and irritated I get. The more irritated I get, the less you sleep.

Let me see if I can summarize your 5 ideas to help me get out of that vicious pain and sleepless night cycle. I need to have a routine time for going to bed and getting up, I need to get myself physically tired, I need to spend some time outdoors, I need to get off my phone, computer and TV an hour before bed but meditate or listen to music instead. And finally, perhaps write down my stresses and worries with possible solutions before I go to bed.

You got it!

I'm so tired now, I could have a nap now, but I won't I'll wait till this evening so I can start my routine.

I'm impressed that you're listening. You know what? You're on the right track and moving forward. Things will get better. Recovery is rarely a smooth journey... it always has its ups and downs.

Thanks, I appreciate your guidance.

Again try these 5 suggestions and let's see how your sleep improves in the next few weeks. Stick to a sleep schedule, exercise daily, get outdoors, meditate or listen to music before bed and perhaps write down your concerns with possible solutions before bed.

Got it! Basically in order to have a good night, I need to have a good day.

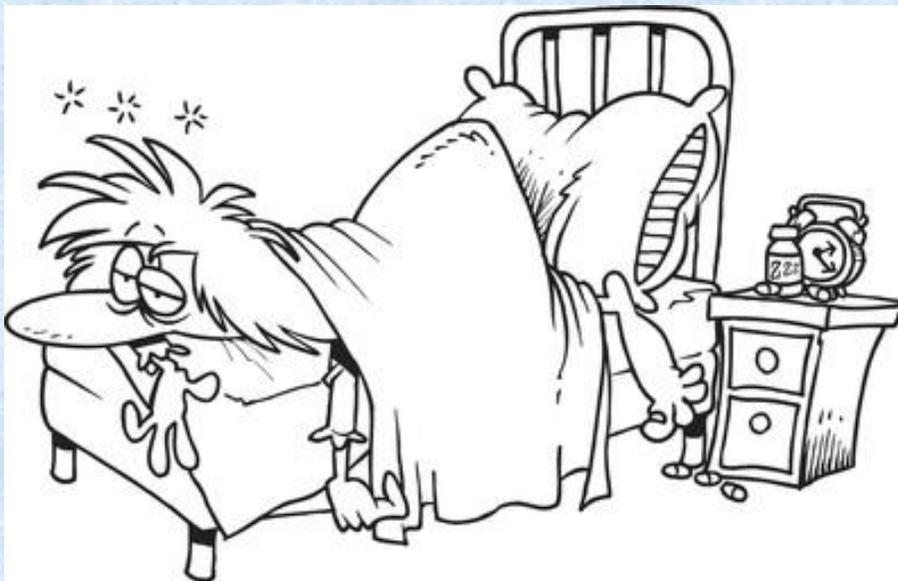
You got it. Bye.

Bye.

Day 12

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves adequate sleep and if senses it is lacking, it will increase stress on the body which can increase nervous system hypersensitivity
2. See a doctor that may refer you to a sleep clinic to test for sleep apnea or other causes of poor sleep
3. Stick to a sleep schedule, exercise daily, get outdoors, meditate or listen to music before bed and perhaps write down your concerns with solutions before bed



Day 13: Hello I'm your pain... I need sunlight

Knock on the door

Who could be knocking on my door so early in the morning?

Knock on the door

I guess I know who it is, just by the knock. It's *my ol' friend*.

Hello, it's me your pain. Did you sleep well last night?

Surprisingly I did sleep well last night, which doesn't happen too often but I've been listening to your 5 suggestions and seeing some improvements in my sleep. I'm even doing some gentle Yoga and Qigong before I go to bed.

I'm proud of you. Have you been eating well?

I believe so... and just to make sure, I saw a dietician who gave me some great advice... I am not on any crazy diet that focuses on eliminating foods. My new diet focuses in ADDING nutritious foods, so I'm really not sensing that I'm depriving myself... I feel good about what I'm eating.

I've also decided to be accepting of my body and since then, I've had a lot less stress... I'm actually making better food decisions.

Wow, you are on the ball. What about hydration, are you drinking your water?

You bet I am. The only problem is that I have to pee more frequently now, I guess that's okay. I've also not had any real or artificial sugary drinks.

And finally have you been in control of your breath?

I go for my daily walks and as I do my exercises I spend a few minutes being conscious of my breaths. Isn't that what you wanted?

Yes, that's all I wanted for you to regularly feel in control and aware of your breath. It doesn't matter to me how you do it, it could be while meditating silently or laughing or exercising.

As you can see, I've been serving you everything that you've requested; air, water, proper nutrition and sleep. So tell me, how may I serve you today?

My need today is very simple. I need sunlight or at least vitamin D.

Funny you say that, cause I had my blood work done and it did show that I was low in my vitamin D... but I didn't think it was that important.

It actually is important. Without adequate sun and vitamin D, we literally deteriorate. Imagine that you were a tree and you had to spend weeks on end indoors without adequate sunlight... what do you think the leaves on that tree would look like?

You got a point. I can try and be outdoors and get some sun in the spring and summertime, but what about the winter months?

Then talk to your healthcare providers about vitamin D supplements and sitting for a while in front of a full spectrum lamp.

Could just getting a bit more natural light and vitamin D really make me feel better?

Again, this is just one piece of the puzzle. All I know is that your nervous system needs to feel alive by being exposed daylight and the sun... even if it is for a few minutes.

All right, I will gladly serve you vitamin D and do my best to spend time outdoors even if it's not a sunny day or winter time.

As your pain and *your friend*, I just want you to know how much I appreciate your efforts to take care of me.

I know that you are taking care of me by protecting me, so it's my duty to make sure that my body is as healthy as it can be so you no longer feel the need to take care of me.

Thank you.

I'm gonna go for my walk now before the sun goes down.

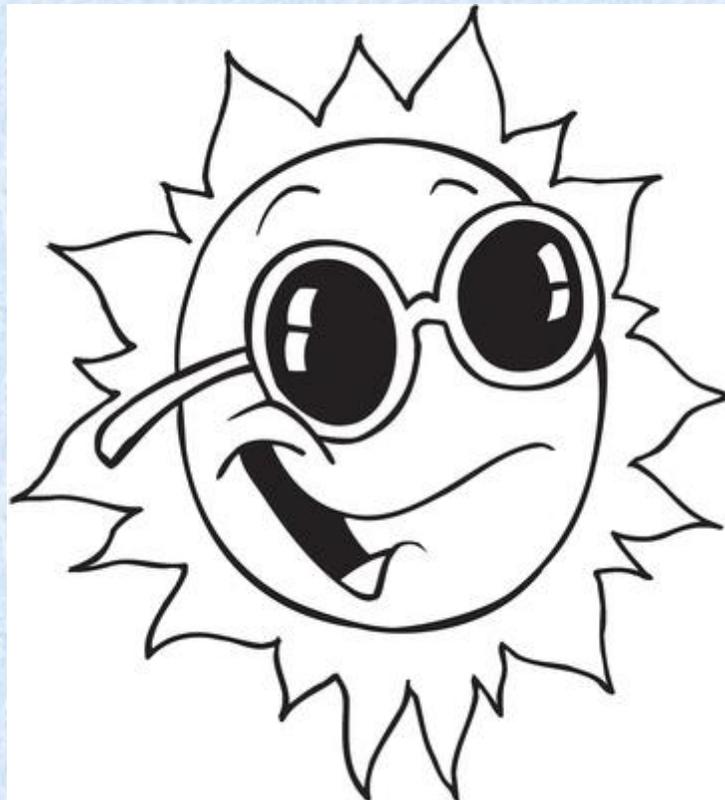
Great idea. Bye!

Bye.

Day 13

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves adequate vitamin D, so see a doctor to have your level tested
2. Consider vitamin D supplementation and if possible, expose your body to direct sunlight or full spectrum light... dosage can vary
3. Spend time outdoors during the day, no matter what season



Day 14: Hello I'm your pain... I need you to experience positive social connections

Knock on the door

It's the same thing, every day I get a knock on the door and there's *my friend* on the other side. When I open the door, I hear, "Hello, it's me your pain". I sometimes ask myself, "Am I getting better or am I just more accepting of the pain?"

Knock on the door

Cause the knock on the door doesn't bother me as much anymore.

Hello, it's me your pain and *your friend*.

Yes, here you are. How may I serve you today?

Before I answer you, let me tell you how grateful I am. You've been serving me 5 of the 7 things that I've desperately needed every day.

You have served me oxygen by consciously breathing and exercising, you've kept hydrated by consciously drinking water, you've given me proper food by being more aware of my nutritional needs, and you've tried to give me better sleep, although that is still a work in progress.

You have also given me more sun and vitamin D but it takes a few months to reap the benefits.

I really appreciate the fact that you are acknowledging how hard I've been trying to serve you... even though not much has changed so far, I still have you around.

I do appreciate the fact that you're no longer fighting me, but doing your best to help me.

It's still an awful feeling to constantly be thinking about you. Sometimes I just want to think about other things in my life. So tell me, what's your 6th desire? How may I serve you today?

My 6th need is for you to experience positive social connections. Basically I need you to show me that you are experiencing some form of human connection on a daily basis. I need you to help me feel that you are not alone... that you have support when you are experiencing fear, worry, or sadness.

Why do you care about my social life? What does that have to do with me feeling pain?

The nervous system is set up to protect you from danger. For millions of years, humans and your ancestors have survived because they've been social animals depending on the family and the tribe for survival.

When your nervous system senses that it has the support of a tribe, it feels it is in safety. However, if the nervous system perceives that it is socially isolated, alone and not part of a tribe or a family, it naturally senses significant danger.

And...

And that sense of danger causes the nervous system to become more hypersensitive and experience more pain.

I do sometimes feel alone. Does being active on social media count?

I'm afraid not. Social media may feel like it's filling the void but it is actually no replacement for real human connection.

I don't know about that, cause being on social media makes me feel good... and I feel connected to my friends and people I used to know.

Remember when we talked about proper nutrition?

Yeah

If you ate only junk food, it would satisfy your sense of hunger by filling up your stomach, but since that junk food is nutritionally deficient, your body would feel deprived and your nervous system would still sense that it is in danger.

That's one reason why eating fast foods or processed and sugary foods lead you to actually eat more, as your body senses the deficiency.

I'm not following what eating junk food has to do with my social life.

Well we all crave social connections... and you can consider social media as the junk food of social connection, it feels like it fills the void but it is in fact nutritionally deficient and it does NOT replace real social connections.

That's why the longer I spend on social media, the more I crave it.

Exactly, but the problem is that people can become ill from only eating junk food... in the same way, people can also become ill emotionally by relying on social media for that sense of belonging and connection that human beings crave.

So in order to be healthy, how big of a social circle do I need to have?

It's not about the quantity but the quality. In real life many need only ONE close friend or family member. It is not about the number of people you know, but about feeling like you belong to a community, a family or have close friends to connect with.

But because of my pain, I've avoided a lot of my socializing as I just don't feel like it.

That's understandable, but the less you socialize, the more sensitive I become.

And the more sensitive you become, the more pain I feel...then I'm less in the mood to connect with people.

And you are in that cycle.

So tell me *my friend*, how may I serve you today?

Make me feel that you are not alone and that you have real social support.

What if I just called and talk to a friend today, would that be okay?

Yep, that's really all I need. But I need you to feel connected every day.

Okay, I'll connect with my family, I'll join the community center again and I'll rejoin the walking group that I used to really like.

Sounds like a great plan. Consider your daily dose of real social connection as important as the sun, food, water and oxygen.

Okay, if that's what it takes to please you, I'll do it.

But don't do it just for me, do it for yourself.

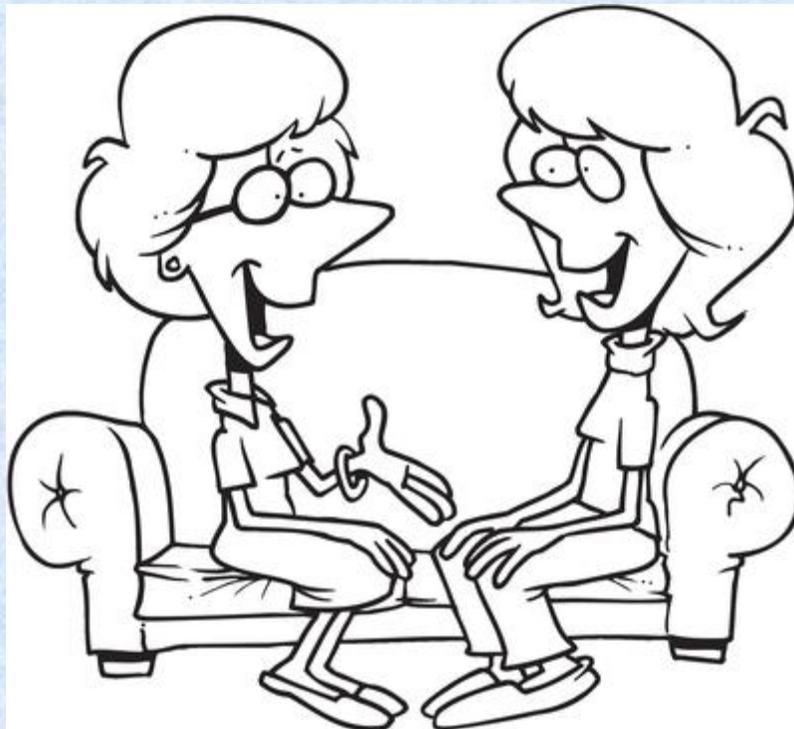
I will *my friend*... bye

Have a socially connecting day. Bye.

Day 14

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves real social connections
2. Consider social media as being the “junk food” of social connection; although it fills the void, it is not nutritious to the nervous system
3. It is not about the number of people you know but about feeling like you belong to a community, a family or have just one close friend to connect with



Day 15: Hello I'm your pain... I need you to have a sense of purpose

Knock on the door

Looks like I have a visitor. I love having guests especially since it's good for my health and well-being.

Knock on the door

Come on in.

Hello, it's me your pain and *your friend*. By the way, have you yet thought of a good humorous or at least a not so scary name for me?

I thought about calling you Charlie or Boo... I'm still working on a fun name for you, but for now I shall continue to refer to you as "*my friend*".

Sounds good to me.

So today is the day where you will tell me the 7th thing that you desire. How may I serve you today?

Before we get to my 7th need, let's do a recap of the first 6. I need you to sense that you are in control of your breath... by meditation, by exercising or even by laughter.

Done!

I need you to keep well hydrated.

Done! I drink 3 cups of water a day and have avoided all sugary drinks.

I need you to feel well-nourished.

Done! I've been cooking my own meals and even tried fasting for a few hours, which was really challenging.

Who said it was easy? I also need you to sleep well.

I'm doing my best, but that is still a work in progress. Before going to bed, instead of looking at a screen, I'm writing my worries in a journal and coming up with solutions... I feel like it's helping me.

That's fantastic. I also asked you to spend time outdoors to get some sun or at least daylight.

Done! I'm spending at least an hour a day outside in nature, got myself a full spectrum light and I'm even taking vitamin D drops.

And I need you to feel like you have REAL social connections.

Done! I met a friend for a drink and it felt really good.

Then we are ready for my final wish.

Which is...

A sense of purpose, to give you reasons to get up in the mornings.

Seriously? You want me to have a sense of purpose?

Yes, then everyday and every week you will have new small goals to move you towards your purpose.

Can my goal for now be... to just be pain-free?

No!

So you want goals like getting back to the hobbies and activities that I once used to enjoy?

Yes, or even decide on new ones.

Like what? Cooking? Playing golf? Painting? Walking? Dancing? Taking care of someone else?

Yes, all of those are great goals.

But when I think about all the things that I used to do that I can no longer do, it just makes me feel worse... especially when YOU are stopping me from doing them.

Have you ever seen a healthcare provider who didn't focus on your pain?

No.

Have you ever seen a healthcare provider who focused on setting specific activity goals to help you move forward?

I'm not sure.

Someone to guide you to set small achievable weekly goals towards the life activities that you really want to do?

Not really, but what's the big deal with having weekly goals?

We all need a reason to get up in the mornings. When you take even tiny steps that move you towards your desired goals, it increases your sense of purpose and control over your life.

It seems really important to you that I feel a sense of purpose and in control of my life.

Of course it's important. When you pursue goals that matter to you, you get a sense of accomplishment and pleasure which will help calm your nervous system.

Before YOU came along, I was pursuing my life goals, but YOU took them away from me.

I got news for you, as your pain, I can't take away your ability to pursue meaningful goals.

Feels like you control most things in my life, so my main goal is always to be free of you.

You know what is a far better goal than being free of me?

No, I can't think of one.

To live a full and rewarding life in spite of me. When you pursue goals that matter to you, you get a sense of accomplishment and pleasure.

I wish I had sense of accomplishment and pleasure in my life, but I am so often overwhelmed with stress and dealing with you.

I am sorry that you're going through this... that must be hard for you.

Thank you for your understanding. Most of the times, I just don't feel like pursuing a goal or being all positive and happy.

That's okay, feeling emotions such as sadness or worry are all a natural part of life.

But I thought my ultimate goals should be to be happy all the time and avoid sadness.

Are you serious?

I feel so much pressure to not feel sad and push aside my feelings and ignore you and push on. I try hard and set the goal to not think about you, but it doesn't seem to work.

Try this, try not to think about an elephant. Go ahead, close your eyes and keep telling yourself that you won't think about an elephant. Did it work?

No, I just realized that when I attempt to not think of something or avoid something, it actually makes me more likely to think about it and experience it.

Exactly, it's pointless to even set the goal of getting rid of me. It's like every day having the goal of not thinking about an elephant.

What do you suggest I do?

I suggest that you change your expectation and goal of being stress-free or pain-free. Instead, accept whatever feelings or sensations you experience, sit with them, and then let them pass on their own.

I'm not quite following you.

In any relationship, do you expect it to always be perfect, happy and positive all the time?

Probably not.

So let's say there is someone out there who expects their relationships to be just that, always happy and positive because they've watched a lot of fairy tale movies where people live happily ever after.

And what's wrong with that?

There's plenty wrong with that. It's not real. Life includes me, your pain, emotional and physical; and for anyone to believe otherwise is only harming them self.

What do you mean?

If you expect a happily ever after relationship, the first argument or disagreement you have with the person will be completely unexpected and will be disastrous.

That one argument could make you think that, that's the end of the relationship, despite all the positive things in the relationship that may exist.

Obviously, in any relationship there are good and some less desired moments, which we must accept, experience and allow them to pass.

What does that all have to do with the pain I feel in my body?

If you expect your health to always be perfect, then when you experience me, it will make you think that this is the end of your health, despite all the positive things about your health and life that still exist.

When it comes to your health, there are good and some less desired moments, which we have to accept, experience and allow them to pass.

How do I exactly do that?

You've been doing that already by the simple fact that you've been opening your door for me. You started off as hostile but now you've become so much more accepting of me and you're actually listening to me.

You're right, I am doing that.

Listen to my final request. I need you to no longer have the goal of being pain-free, as it's as harmful as having goals such as being stress-free or worry-free.

I need you to have goals that are based on activities that are important and meaningful to you or activities that you used to enjoy at some point in the past.

Do you have any idea how difficult it is to do the activities that I used to once enjoy? You've taken those away from me.

That's why I need you to see a healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about persistent pain and setting goals to help you move towards activities that give your life meaning; even if it's not exactly the same activities that you used to do.

What if I set goals and just become disappointed for not achieving them.

As your pain and your nervous system, I don't care the least bit about achieving any goals.

All I care about is the feeling that you are moving towards something and have a reason to get out of bed.

I have seen a number of doctors and therapists and their goal is always to make me feel better by getting rid of you.

And how has that worked out for you so far?

Well it's sometimes temporarily better, but my main goal is to just survive day to day.

If your main goal everyday is to just survive and do everything to get rid of me by searching the internet and visiting different doctors and therapists, it's just not a good set up for a meaningful life.

If you wish to live a fulfilling life, you need a purpose that is outside of just us.

I don't know what you mean by purpose. I just want to be normal and live a normal life.

Then if you truly wish to live a normal life, then you need to find something to live for.

And what is that?

I don't know... it's for you to figure out. People often find their purpose is their family, their hobbies, activities, work or through learning. Some find their purpose by helping and serving others in various ways, which is great, but that can sometimes backfire if done too much.

And what's wrong with helping others?

Nothing's wrong with that... but I also need you to spend time on YOU, doing things that YOU desire.

I must admit, since you came in my life, I sense that I may have lost my purpose other than to be without you. I mostly do the exact same things everyday and intentionally avoid trying anything new.

To stimulate and revive your nervous system, you MUST try new things... your brain craves the stimulation. By new things I don't mean anything exotic, but things like trying out a new recipe, calling up an old friend, walking on a different trail, starting a new

exercise routine, reading a new book, listening to new music or even trying a new hobby or something you've not done in a long while.

Based on advice from different people, I've stopped many of my usual activities. I intentionally avoid experiencing new stuff, cause I just don't want to make my situation any worse.

Are you kidding me? Doing the same things everyday is what's making your situation worse. You need to focus on not taking away but adding new experiences into your days, no matter how small.

It could be leaning to bake, dance or to play the piano, chess or table tennis.

Some days, I just don't even feel like getting out of bed and you expect me to play chess or dance.

No, I expect you do so something that drives you. You need positive reasons to get out of bed and if your main reason is to be pain-free, worry-free or stress-free or elephant-free, you will pretty much attract those thoughts and are guaranteed to experience them.

Okay, you've convinced me that it's really important for me to have a purpose and set activity goals that are meaningful to me, and experience new things in my life. How do I do that?

That's where you need a coach such as a healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about goal setting and someone who will see you as more than just a person experiencing pain who needs to be fixed.

I've already seen so many doctors and therapists who've done their best to fix me and eliminate my pain. Since talking to you, I now realize that that approach isn't working for me anymore.

So what are you thinking?

I am going to try a new approach, where my goal is no longer to be pain-free but to lead a meaningful life even if some days I'm forced do it with you. But sometimes... you are just too much for me to handle. (With a big sigh)

I'm sorry about that. When you start treating me as not your enemy but as *your friend*, you will notice that I will stop being as great of a nuisance in your life and your life will move forward.

Thank you for having this conversation with me for the past two weeks, you have no idea how much you have positively changed my life.

And I thank you for listening to me. You now know the pain truth and nothing but. I hope you can see that I'm not just your pain, I am you!

I am going to replay all the things that you've taught me from day one, when you first knocked on my door and tried to talk to me. I was angry and hostile towards you... I am sorry.

No need to apologize, I know I have that effect on people. It's not personal.

I am only here to communicate with you and help you become an even better version of you. *"Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, then it's not the end."* - John Lennon.

**THE END
THE BEGINNING**

Day 15

What I learned today from my conversation with pain...

1. The nervous system craves purpose, small achievable goals and daily new experiences
2. If your goals are to be pain-free, stress-free or elephant-free, you will attract those thoughts and guaranteed to experience them
3. Find a healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about persistent pain and setting meaningful activity goals that will help you move forward

