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Switch Your Brain Into Healing Mode

Workbook

The Pain Brain

What changes when pain becomes chronic?

Brain Response

Structural and functional changes take place in key brain regions that are responsible for **processing, regulating, and making sense of pain.**¹

These changes make it **easier for the brain to continue the cycle of pain.**

Once these changes take place, the primary cause of ongoing pain is no longer an injury in the body, but a **learned process in the brain.**

Pain Beliefs

Chronic pain has a strong correlation with the **development or worsening of anxiety**, leading to patterns of fear, activity avoidance, pain catastrophizing, and hypervigilance.

Fear of undiscovered structural damage is common: 43.9% of people with chronic pain agree with the statement "The pain I feel is a sign that damage is being done."²

Pain Experience

As pain becomes chronic, it is **common for the pain experience to intensify**, with patients reporting increased pain frequency, intensity, duration, and disability.

¹ Yang, Seoyon, and Min Cheol Chang. "Chronic Pain: Structural and Functional Changes in Brain Structures and Associated Negative Affective States." *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 26 June 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6650904/>. ² Curable Survey, n=735

Brain-Centric Healing

What is it, and how is it different?

Brain-Centric Healing aims to:

Reduce or eliminate pain

Shift one's beliefs about the cause of pain and the threat level of pain

Teach the brain to reinterpret signals as safe instead of dangerous and painful

Provide techniques for navigating daily stressors **without triggering physical pain**

Examples: The Curable App, Pain Reprocessing Therapy

Traditional Mind-Based Approaches aim to:

Accept and manage pain

Reduce the impact pain has on one's daily life

Improve physical and emotional well-being **despite the pain**

Provide techniques for **better coping** with pain and reducing general stress levels

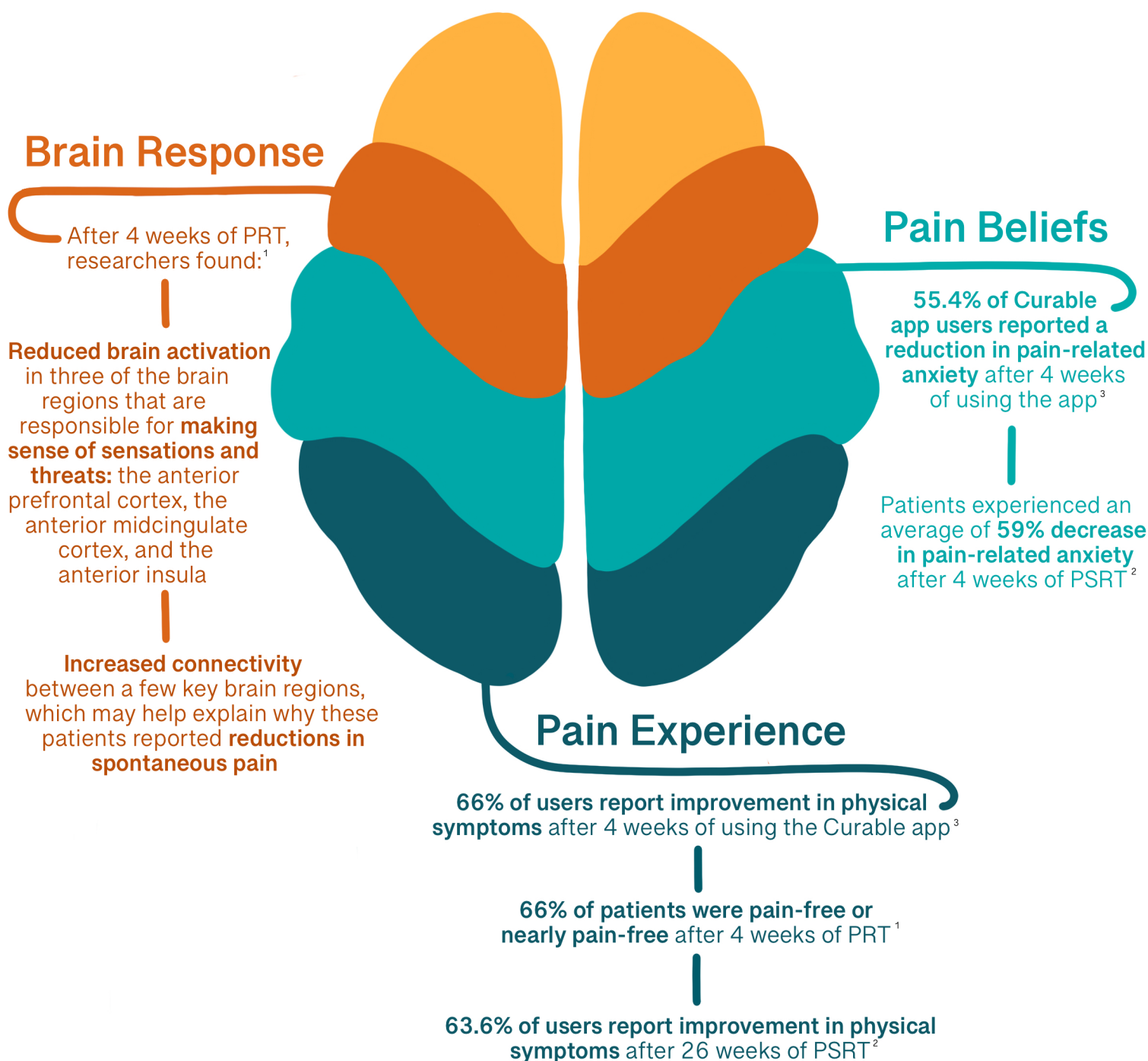
Examples: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

VS

The Healing Brain

What changes take place when chronic pain is treated with a brain-centric approach?

All results shown were obtained from following brain-centric healing protocols or programs, including:
The Curable App | Pain Reprocessing Therapy (PRT)* | Psychophysiologic Symptom Relief Therapy (PSRT)*



*Results from PRT and PSRT specifically apply to non-specific chronic lower back pain. ¹Ashar, Yoni et al. "Effect of Pain Reprocessing Therapy vs Placebo and Usual Care for Patients with Chronic Back Pain." JAMA Network, 29 Sept. 2021, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2784694>.

²Donnino, Michael, et al. "Psychophysiologic Symptom Relief Therapy for Chronic Back Pain: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial." Pain Reports, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 23 Sept. 2021, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34589642/> ³Curable Global Patient Impression of Change Survey, n = 10,173

3-Step Guide to Disarming the Brain's Pain Alarm

1

Do a Somatic Tracking Exercise

When pain comes along, the first instinct most people have is to push the sensation away. Next time pain arises, try this gentler approach instead. It just might **help the sensation move through you more quickly without so much resistance and struggle.**

Close your eyes and lean into the sensation. Try to observe it without judgement or resistance, simply accepting its presence. Be careful not to associate any emotions with the sensation, just examine it as if you were a third party. Notice different attributes to the sensation, like where it's located and whether it's moving or changing. Observe the sensation with a sense of pure curiosity, careful not to resist it or judge it as a bad sensation. After a few minutes of this, open your eyes and continue to maintain this attitude of curiosity and nonjudgement throughout the day.

Companion Exercise in the Curable App:

[Somatic Tracking](#)

Step 2 →

2

Update the Brain's Facts

The prefrontal cortex is the most significant and logical part of the brain. It helps make sense of experiences, put them into perspective, process them, and move on. Unfortunately, when pain arises, the more primitive parts of the brain (like the amygdala, anterior cingulate cortex, and hippocampus) take control, making it difficult for the prefrontal cortex to defuse the situation.

At that time, it is important to actively engage the prefrontal cortex by reminding your brain that **the painful sensation you feel is not dangerous**. Use the statements below to remind your brain of the facts:

Pain is not dangerous.

Pain is not necessarily a sign of structural damage in the body.
Pain can be present with no structural damage at all.

Even when structural abnormalities are present,
they are very rarely the cause of long-term chronic pain.

Chronic pain is perpetuated by learned neural pathways in the brain. These pathways can create real and intense pain, but they can also be unlearned, reversing the cycle of pain.

You can be in pain and still be completely safe and healthy.

Companion Exercise in the Curable App:

Updating Your Facts About Pain

3

Switch the Signals from Danger to Safety

Shift your physiological state using one or more of the following techniques:

Deepen your breathing, then focus on the breath with your eyes closed for 3-5 minutes.

Close your eyes and vividly visualize a place that makes you feel safe.
Imagine that you are physically there now.

Prove to your brain and body that you are safe by performing
gentle movement such as stretching or walking.

Companion Exercise in the Curable App:

Safe Place Visualization

Letter writing activity →

Letter-Writing Activity

When pain comes around, the brain short circuits into a more fearful, primitive way of thinking. During these times, it can be easy to forget what you have learned about pain and slip into a spiral of pain and fear.

At a time when you are feeling clear-headed, write a persuasive letter to your “pain brain” explaining that you are safe despite any pain signals that may be firing. Include the facts and safety signals you find most compelling and reassuring. When pain comes around, re-read this letter out loud in a soothing and confident tone.



How to Reduce Pain-Related Anxiety

Make Positive and Generous Assumptions About Your Body

It is easy to get trapped in anxious thoughts about the future when you live with chronic pain. Thoughts like “I’ll never get better” and “my body is broken” are common, but they are also deeply unhelpful to the healing process.

Many people believe that by anticipating the worst-case scenario, they will be able to avoid pain and disappointment if an unfavorable outcome unfolds. However, when it comes to pain, **expectations can directly influence the outcome**. So by expecting the worst-case scenario, they may actually be steering themselves in that direction.

In order to switch your brain into “healing mode,” you need to shift your expectations. This involves making positive and generous assumptions about your body, like:

Your body is not broken, it has simply been trying to protect you.

Your body is capable of healing.

Your body is capable of performing more daily movement and activities, given a slow and steady increase plan.

Companion Exercise in the Curable App:

Triggers and Expectations

List 3 more positive and generous assumptions that you can make about your body:

Give Your Brain and Body the Opportunity to Exceed Your Expectations

Have you ever avoided exercise for fear that it may trigger pain? Has the fear of future pain started to limit the kinds of activities you are willing to take on? Have you ever cancelled plans with friends (or avoided making them altogether) out of fear that pain would arise?

This is called the fear-avoidance cycle, and it can lead to increased disability over time. In this cycle, any situation that has the potential to lead to pain or discomfort is avoided. To break out of this cycle, it is important to adopt an approach that focuses on **responding** to pain signals as they arise rather than **anticipating** them in advance.

Little by little, try testing the boundaries of what your brain and body can handle. This may not seem worth the risk on a small scale, but over time, it will help you to expand your life again.

This approach requires:

Confidence that your brain and body will likely be able to handle more than you anticipate.

Patience as your body adjusts to new boundaries.

Acceptance that sometimes pain will rise, and that is okay.

Certainty that you will be able to successfully navigate any pain that arises (just as you have hundreds of times before).

What will you do in the next week to give your brain and body the opportunity to exceed your expectations?
