

Preface

by Bruce Eimer, PhD, ABPP

Pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other.

- Laurence Sterne

Pain and pleasure are both parts of life. They are really two sides of the same coin because there would be no pleasure without pain, and no pain without pleasure. Ironically, this reality provides a way out of pain. And the way to close the “gate” on constant pain is to re-learn how to embrace joy and pleasure.

The title of our book, *Taming Chronic Pain: A Mindful Approach for Bringing Pain Relief*, summarizes our philosophy of pain management. To “tame” something, or someone, means to establish a relationship with what one intends to tame. Through that relationship, one establishes influence and develops control over the other’s behavior.

To be “mindful” means to be present and non-judgmental. It is a gentle approach to life. My co-author Roy Hunter and I have independently developed our own mindful approaches to pain control based on our individual clinical practices and our personal “struggles” with chronic pain over the years.

We use the term “bringing pain relief” to emphasize that pain relief is temporary because pain is a part of life. We will teach you how to take away pain. But pain will come back. Then you need to know how to take it away again to restore relief. This is the ongoing rhythm of life. The intent is to live with less pain. We will explain and elaborate these ideas throughout this book.

We began our collaboration on pain management in 2013. Since then, we have been working together to refine our approach to “taming chronic pain” with compassionate self-awareness and mindfulness.

Much of the published material regarding mindfulness has extensive roots in Eastern Buddhist psychology, and in the pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and his associates at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine and Health Care at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Mindful approaches to mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health improvement have become popular topics these days, and for good reason. They make good sense; and have been proven effective in creating positive health-related outcomes. Also, they can be easily integrated with different ways of working.

Both of us are experienced in practicing mindfulness and meditation in different ways for many years. The practice of mindfulness exercises has helped us help ourselves and our clients manage stress and get relief from persistent pain – *without fighting the pain!*

In our clinical work, we both use interactive focused imagery and relaxation techniques. We are both experienced professional hypnotherapists who teach self-hypnosis methods when indicated to our clients and patients. Hypnosis and relaxation therapies have been proven to be effective evidence-based treatments for chronic pain endorsed by the National Institutes of Health, the American Pain Society, the American Medical Association, and the American Psychological Association.

Since this is a self-help book, and not an academic text, we will not distract you by citing “tons” of references throughout the book. If you are interested in reading more about the topics we address, you can refer to the Bibliography and Recommended Reading section at the back of the book. There you will find a list of pertinent publications for further studies if you wish.

With a little guidance, and an open mind, even if your life has been invaded by pain and made barren of pleasure, you can learn to close the “pain gate” in your nervous system. The key to getting out of pain is to let less pain through your nervous system by closing or narrowing the opening of that “pain gate”. To locate and gain control of your “master switch”, you must help yourself to accept change; because reality has it that nothing stays the same forever.

Many (but not all) of the folks with chronic pain syndromes we have seen have experienced some type of trauma in their life (physical, emotional, sexual, or otherwise). While it is an oxymoron to say that *all trauma is traumatic*, it is true; and it is a scientific and psychological fact that harrowing and shocking experiences activate the impulse to fight or flee from the threat. But we also know from our combined sixty-plus years of working with people in pain, that neither continuing to run away from reality nor continuing to fight it helps people to get out of pain.

Mindful Pain Control, or MPC, as we call it, is about *taming your pain using your brain*. MPC is not about combating, fighting or defeating pain. We advocate and present a gentle approach that emphasizes awareness and acceptance of reality and making an ongoing commitment to healthier behavior one step at a time.

Mindful Pain Control encompasses *accepting* responsibility for what you do about your pain, *watching* your pain change, *adjusting* your responses to pain and stress, *releasing* unnecessary emotional and attitudinal burdens, and *envisioning* yourself feeling better in the future as you become better at restoring comfort and relief. In fact, these are the mindful components of our *AWARE formula* for taming chronic pain, detailed in this book.

Taming Chronic Pain

Roy Hunter and I have helped thousands of clients and patients over the years to learn *mindful approaches* for managing stress and for taming chronic pain. Many of these same techniques that we teach have helped both of us live normal lives with our own chronic pain. The methods we describe for taming chronic pain can work for you as well if you give them a chance. You will naturally find that some methods work for you better than other methods.