

Pain Relief

Control your Pain with Self-Hypnosis

Sabra Redfern

The logo for 'Imagine Changes' features a stylized graphic of a plant with several leaves on the left side. To the right of this graphic, the words 'Imagine' and 'Changes' are stacked vertically in a cursive, orange-brown font. The entire logo is set against a light yellow-green oval background.

Imagine
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WELCOME

You've made a good choice to own the information contained in this book. With focus, clarity, and practice, you can find relief from chronic pain.

About this book

This is a practical guide to help you gain control of your body. Acknowledging the pain you feel and being in charge of it can be elusive. By reading and/or listening to this information and then faithfully practicing it, you can do more than gain control of the pain; you may even be able to eliminate it. These techniques will help you and others throughout your lives. I do not intend for anyone to use these techniques or take these suggestions instead of seeking medical advice from an MD or ND.

About Sabra Redfern

I am a personal development coach living in Portland, Oregon. In my practice I use traditional Hypnotherapy and Ericksonian Hypnotherapy as well as Neuro-Linguistic Psychology in my work. I decided to write this book because I have personally benefitted from the techniques described within and think everyone should know how to use them. Let's all feel better! The confidence I have gained from successfully dampening a chronic pain problem is invaluable.

Learn more about me at my website, www.imaginechanges.com.

ABOUT PAIN

The Puzzle of Pain

Statistics show that pain lasting more than a few days without relief is an important health issue in the United States. In 2001, a commission on hospital accreditation made it a requirement that hospitals evaluate pain as a vital sign. For Kaiser Permanente, the country's largest managed health care organization, pain assessment has become as important as measuring pulse, respiration, and blood pressure when evaluating a patient in an emergency room setting. This is better medicine for those of us who suffer.

Scalability

Pain is difficult to measure. Its intensity, and its beginning, middle and ending are almost always subjective. To ensure effective treatment, you will need to be able to talk about your pain in a way that accurately communicates its qualities. In a medical setting, you will be asked to place a numerical value on your pain using a scale from zero, signifying very little pain, to ten for pain that feels unbearable.

Good News

It's good news that there is continued attention being given to pain, evident in the growth of pain clinics, the use of more sophisticated pain medications, and the integration of alternative medicine, which has become more mainstream. Hypnotherapy is now a major contributor to quality alternative healthcare.

As a professional hypnotherapist I can help you by individualizing your treatment, but before I help you discover the resources to be found in self-hypnosis, let me illustrate some of the puzzling aspects of pain.

Pain History

You have pain memory. Your body and mind work together to remember past experiences, especially when they are accompanied by fear and helplessness. These become traumatic events that are stored away in your mind for future reference.

A New Trauma

Later, when you experience a serious trauma, your unconscious mind directs your body and your conscious mind to protect them, bringing forward the old, stored information from long ago. This causes stress and often an unnecessarily strong response to the current situation. This pattern can lead to chronic pain.

Stress

Chronic pain can be created by stress after the traumatic event is over. You may well be physically fit, but experiencing a stressful situation soon after your recovery can trigger pain. Fortunately, hypnosis can help you to utilize your own inner resources to counteract stress and develop a strategy for staying healthy and pain-free.

This includes learning and practicing relaxation techniques and enlisting the creative unconscious mind to direct you toward a solution.

How We Feel Pain

Pain starts with peripheral nerves—nerves located throughout the body that specialize in detecting different types of sensations. When we feel the pain of a bug bite or bang our knee on something hard, pain signals send the message to your spinal cord. And there is a hierarchy with pain—severe pain gets to the spinal cord and brain quickly, while dull or aching pain is sent more slowly and so receives a lower priority in the nervous system.

Acute or Chronic

We learn at a young age that acute pain is protective. How else would we survive childhood without this accurate and efficient response to potential injury? Intense pain does a good job warning us of dangerous conditions, but when pain persists long after the event that caused it has passed, it no longer serves a purpose. This kind of pain, categorized as chronic, can be difficult to get rid of. In fact, chronic pain actually has its own health category and is viewed by the medical profession as a condition unrelated to the original cause of pain.

Biochemical

The nerves in your body, the central nervous system, and the brain are all influenced by biochemical and electrical impulses. Acute pain gets the fastest ride to the brain. The chemicals involved in relaying messages to the brain for less acute pain take more time and are considered secondary to the brain's protection of your whole body. Unfortunately, this is where chronic pain can take over. Hypnosis can help you identify and correct this process. You can gain control over chronic pain.

How Others See You

Pain can make you feel like your personality is changing, like you've lost control of your life. You may feel unable to control feelings of negativity.

Pain can be difficult to sympathize with, even by those who love you. Because they can't see or feel your pain, they may begin to doubt you. Your obvious unhappiness can drive others away as they realize they can't help you. They begin to feel powerless.

Persistent Pain

Persistent, chronic pain is hard for other people to identify with unless they've experienced it themselves.

- ◆ Even people who know and love you can doubt your pain, causing you more stress and anxiety. You may begin to feel like no one believes you.

- ◆ You can begin to doubt yourself, to think of yourself as “less than.” Your self-confidence may tank.
- ◆ Strangers are sometimes quick to judge your ill behavior because they can’t see a reason for it. This may contribute to a sense of isolation.

HOW HYPNOSIS CAN HELP

Hypnotherapy clinics and private practitioners offer a variety of techniques and services to help with pain, as I do in my private practice. There are also techniques you can use on your own, and with practice you can create a self-hypnotic state to substantially reduce your pain sensations.

Enjoy

Keep in mind that it is possible for you to enjoy your imaginings. Self-hypnosis is similar to meditation, but with hypnosis you can expand upon your visualizations rather than watch them pass by.

Scale

Learn to give your pain a number on a scale from zero to ten. Write it down. Watch your improvement over time. Keep a journal of your pain and its improvement.

BEGINNING SELF-HYPNOSIS

As an introduction to self-hypnosis, let’s begin with a light and colorful visualization. I teach this to my clients during their first session so they can immediately understand the inner resources they have. The ability to visualize is natural. If you’ve driven a car, or ridden a bike, or even if you’ve been a passenger in a car, I’m sure you can recall a time when you couldn’t remember the process of getting to a stop sign. Perhaps you were daydreaming about other things. This is a trance, and it really isn’t any different than self-hypnosis. It’s just that you weren’t aware you were doing this. Wouldn’t it be great to have control of this process? Well, you can.

Make it a Habit

Train yourself to complete the following exercise every night before you go to sleep. You may have other things you like to do, such as meditation or prayer, but be sure to add this to your bedtime ritual, just before you finally close your eyes for the night.

Breathing

Attentive breathing is the key to relaxation and, as you may know, the center of many spiritual practices. Paying attention to your breathing takes you to the juncture where your involuntary nervous system meets your

voluntary nervous system, and herein resides the portal to your unconscious mind. With practice, you can learn to focus and control your pain by making this exercise part of your daily routine.

Breathing and Color Visualization Exercise

Proper breathing prepares you for all of the exercises in this book.

1. Make yourself comfortable by stretching a little and settling into a chair that lets you place your feet flat on the floor in front of you. Take the time to be aware of your whole body so that you will be able to feel the difference between now and when you're done with this exercise. Let your hands relax on your lap in a comfortable position, with your palms facing your body.
2. Start by taking three deep breaths, each time inhaling to the silent count of four and exhaling slowly to the count of eight.
3. With your eyes closed, imagine all the colors of the rainbow. Let the image of a rainbow pass by, and imagine each color, one by one. To help you visualize these colors, remember the acronym ROY G. BIV: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

RED Begin with red: red apples, red fire engine, red wagon, red stop light, red stop sign—choose whatever comes to your mind—and if you can't settle your mind on an object, imagine holding in your hand a large paint brush and painting the color red onto a large, flat area, letting the color fully saturate the surface.

ORANGE Imagine the color orange, the first of two colors in the rainbow that are both a noun and an adjective (the second is violet). See brilliant oranges or cantaloupes, luscious peaches, delicious sweet peppers, or a beautiful sunset. Enjoy letting the color orange take all of your attention as you relax and ease the color into your mind so it's all that you see.

YELLOW What is your favorite shade of yellow? Fresh lemons, ripe summer squash, lemon meringue pie, sunflowers, or black-eyed Susans? Consider this slowly, never rushing it. It's best to luxuriate in the colors.

GREEN There are so many shades of green it's easy to find one that appeals to you. Green Maple, Oak, or Cedar tree leaves, fresh green beans or peas, green light, or green grass. You're getting the hang of this now.

BLUE Who doesn't love a particular color of blue? A clear blue sky, the brilliant blue ocean, fresh blueberries, the bright blue eyes of a newborn child...

INDIGO Now consider indigo, the color of dusk, and dark denim.

VIOLET You can visualize the bright purple petals of the violet flower, or let the color be a shade of violet, such as lilac. What do you see? Pay attention, and let the colors serve as evidence that you are able to visualize.

The “I am” Statement

This is the best self-hypnotic technique you can teach yourself. Read through this section and then read it again slowly, and finally, complete the exercise described within it. This is the foundation of the self-hypnosis I am recommending in this book. Once you learn this technique, you can use it to work on any issue you choose.

Before you relax and use this technique, you must have an outcome in mind, something you feel strongly about. In the scope of this book, pain relief is the desired outcome. With a strong feeling about your outcome, something you really want, you can begin.

Set aside 10-15 minutes and find a quiet place. Let yourself begin to relax. Get yourself into a comfortable seated position, feet squarely on the floor, body aligned, and take three deep breaths. Inhale through your nose, letting your diaphragm push your belly out for a count of four. Then exhale through your mouth, releasing all the tension from your body, counting to eight. As you practice this you can make the counts longer, expanding to eight counts in and 16 counts out.

By breathing this way, you are automatically activating relaxation and making a direct connection from your body to your unconscious mind. This is where voluntary and involuntary reflexes come together.

Focus

Continue being conscious of your breathing, relaxing, and letting go, and when you achieve a sense of relaxation, look up at a corner of the ceiling. Focus on this corner, on this one point, bringing all your attention to it, noticing everything about it. As you continue to focus while practicing your relaxed breathing, notice that your eyelids are starting to become relaxed. All the muscles around your eyes become relaxed. Resist letting your eyes close. Be aware that your tongue is just resting in your mouth. A resting tongue helps quiet a busy mind. Begin to say to yourself, “I am.”

Peripheral Vision

Notice that while you’re still focused on that point and feeling relaxed, you can become aware of your peripheral vision, that you can look at the point of focus and at the same time see everything to your far left and far right. You are able to expand your awareness to the space behind you, and above you as well. Do this slowly now, noticing even the space below you, so that you become aware of being suspended. Your chair sits firmly on the ground, but you are aware of being just a part of the whole picture. Use all of your peripheral vision, your de-focused vision. You are starting to shift your breathing so that you are in a relaxed state that will allow you to find your resources, and help you achieve whatever you want. As you maintain your awareness of

feeling suspended, you can let your eyes close. They may close naturally, but it's fine if they don't. The point is to continue to feel the sense of how you can expand your awareness. By feeling this expansiveness while continuing to be conscious of your breath, you are conditioning your nervous system to be relaxed, yet alert. Now continue to say the words "I am." You will find a rhythm by connecting your breathing with these two words: "I am."

Choose a Situation

The next step is to visualize yourself in a situation that you choose. See yourself exactly the way you want to be, doing what you want to do, being the way you choose to be. You'll want to see this in life-sized color, and hear yourself saying something about it, using as much of your senses as you can. Fully experience this at the unconscious level and as you visualize it, you feel good. You might say to yourself, "I am feeling more relaxed and this allows me to let go of my pain." Or, "I am well and have no pain," using the positive intention approach.

See yourself in the situation of your choice, doing what you want to do, being how you want to be, and feeling just how you want to feel. Take all the time you need to see and feel this. Create that picture and hold onto it as long as it naturally stays in your mind. Let it go when it begins to fade away. Let it go completely. You can bring your thoughts back to the "I am" statement, noticing the feeling that moves through your entire body now. Become aware of the deep relaxation in your body, and the even rhythm of your breathing. (John Overdurf, 1995)

Something New

With your expanded awareness and relaxation, you've used the "I am" effectively and your eyes will open naturally. As you adjust to your surroundings, you will notice that you are completely alert and awake. You now have a new resource for supporting your well-being, and you can do this exercise whenever you want.

PERSONAL STORIES OF SELF-HYPNOSIS

Here are two stories that illustrate the use of self-hypnosis to eliminate pain. Remembering these stories will help you remember the techniques. Try to keep it simple.

Jane's Story

Jane described her feelings about having persistent pain in her left knee since her recovery from surgery. Soccer season was only a couple of weeks away and she felt embarrassed that she still had pain. She knew two other people with similar injuries who had recovered without pain, and Jane couldn't understand why her knee still hurt.

SELF-TALK I suggested that Jane consider her self-confidence, and counseled her that learning to counter negative, resigned self-talk with helpful thoughts would be part of the prescription for pain relief. I explained how the brain's neural pathways can become "ruts," and that she could create new, healthier neural pathways by limiting negative self-talk. By doing this, the unhelpful neural pathways would begin to lose their strength and eventually be replaced by healthy thinking.

BREATHING I asked Jane to pay attention to her breathing, to breathe in relaxation from her belly to her silent count of four, and breathe out tension to her count of eight. It's important to breathe from the diaphragm to make the connection between the voluntary system and the involuntary. Jane did this three times. I reminded her that learning to use her breathing was essential, just like learning to breathe correctly in sports.

THE "I AM" STATEMENT I asked Jane to focus on a spot above her line of vision, and then de-focus and imagine herself being however she wanted to be, feeling however she wanted to feel, using "I am" statements. I suggested that she would remember the following story and could close her eyes and think of it from beginning to end if she started to feel unsure of herself or if she felt twinges of pain.

COLD STREAM You are enjoying the view from the trailhead to an easy hike up a small mountain. Because you are using your imagination, you can imagine yourself perfectly fit to take this hike. You begin up the trail, enjoying the peacefulness of the forest, the scent of the forest floor, the dappled light. After about a half hour you come upon a stream moving steadily down the side of the mountain, and from where you stand you can see the stream weaving its way downward. There is a sturdy wooden bridge in front of you. You cross it, and see an inviting sandy path leading down to the stream. You take the path down and lean over to place your hand in the water and feel surprised by its icy temperature. The water is knee-deep and you decide that wading through it to the other side would be fun, so you start slowly across and feel the intense cold of the water penetrating your left knee, feeling only cold. There is no pain and you experience instant relief and a realization that this temperature is an immediate pain reliever. You can use it for any pain, but by enjoying it for your knee, right now, it is healing your knee. As you continue to walk up the embankment on the other side of the stream, you feel no pain. You remember to say to yourself "I am free of pain," and see clearly the mountain stream, feel the cold temperature on your knee and experience soothing relief. You head back down the trail to the valley below and you are satisfied that you've ended your ordeal with this pain.

You can take this trail any time you want to, any time you need to. You have the power to control the pain, the power to eliminate it right now if this is right for you. If you no longer have the need for the pain, you can let it go.

FEEL ALERT I told Jane she could return from her extreme relaxation by my count of five, feeling

deeply relaxed, four, curious about how she'll be feeling, three, beginning to stretch toes and fingers, two, back and almost ready, and one, feeling alert and awake.

WAKE YOURSELF Try using this story and the suggestions for yourself. You can always bring yourself out of your self-hypnosis by counting from five to one, knowing that you're in charge.

Simple Steps from Jane's Story

The simple steps of the self-hypnotic relief are:

1. Breathe three times consciously, from the belly.
2. Start deeper relaxation with the "I am" exercise.
3. Within the "I am" exercise, imagine yourself in the simple story, applying cold for your pain relief.
4. Change the story if you like. You understand the principle of enlisting sensory images to use temperature.
5. Bring yourself back to alertness by counting from five to one.

Christina's Story

Christina was an athletic trainer but had been in so much sharp pain since her ovarian cyst had been removed that she had successfully trained herself to avoid using her body. Instead, she altered her teaching style from physical example to verbal example. She was suffering from self-doubt and the continuous, sharp pain she felt resigned to living with. OR, None of the several doctors she had seen could find any physiological reason for her pain and referred to it as ghost pain.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISOLATION Christina felt very discouraged and was embarrassed to complain about her pain. She no longer talked about it with anyone. She doubted herself and she was in constant pain, "faking her way" through every day.

BREATHING I asked Christina to pay attention to her breathing, to breathe in relaxation from her belly to her silent count of four, and breathe out tension to her count of eight. Breathing from the diaphragm makes the connection from involuntary action to voluntary. Christina did this three times.

I AM I referred Christina back to the "I am" exercise, encouraging her to focus on a spot above her line of vision, de-focus, and imagine herself being however she wanted to be, feeling how she wanted to feel. I suggested that she would remember the following technique and could close her eyes and think of it from beginning to end if she started to feel unsure of herself, or if she felt twinges of pain.

LETTING GO As Christina relaxed from breathing and using the “I am” exercise, I asked her to close her eyes and focus on the pain, and to relax the area around the pain. I encouraged her to focus on the pain and be certain there was no longer any reason for her body to react this way, and that it was okay to let it go.

FINDING INNER RESOURCES: MOVING ENERGY I asked Christina to place her hands in front of her in prayer position. Next, I had her rub her palms together five or six times and then pull her hands to about an inch apart, noticing the warmth and energy between them, waiting until she felt a kind of electricity or magnetism between them. Christina could feel the energy passing from one hand to the other.

MORE CONTROL The next step was for Christina to place her hands in her lap and feel the energy in her right hand, visualizing it slowly moving up her right shoulder, over to her left shoulder, and down her left arm, and into her left hand. Christina repeated this several times, and each time it became easier.

CREATE A SHAPE AND COLOR Now that Christina had the ability to move energy from one hand to the other, I asked her to be aware of the energy around her pain. I asked her if she could make the pain into a shape, and what shape it would be.

She told me it was round. Then I suggested she make it a color, and she chose red. Christina now had a round, red object to represent her pain.

IMAGINE THE OBJECT ELSEWHERE I asked Christina where in the world she could place this red, round object that was residing in her pelvis. Where could she put it so that it would be more useful. She thought for a while and said it could be used as a stop light just two blocks up the street. Now we had a recipe. The pain was round and red, could be moved, and would be useful as a stoplight.

MOVE OUT OF THE BODY I suggested she take the round red ball and taking a deep breath in, start moving the object toward her legs, feeling the pain as energy or even pressure moving down to the knee, to the foot, and then out through the toes, imagining placing it as the stoplight two blocks up the street.

GONE Christina reported that her pain was gone. Where did it go? Her unconscious mind placed it somewhere where it would be useful. Was the pain real? To Christina it was very real. But now, it was gone.

AWAKEN I asked Christina to become alert and present by reminding her that she could always count from five to one and make herself feel alert and awake. She did so.

Remember, you can complete this exercise on your own. Feeling self-doubt? Having chronic pain like

Christina? You can do this.

The Steps from Christina's Story

1. Breathe deeply three times.
2. Use the "I am" statement.
3. Follow the steps to become aware of and then move energy with your hands.
4. Decide on a shape and color for your pain.
5. Think of a place where the pain/object would be useful.
6. Move the pain/object out of the body and place it where you choose.

ONE FINAL TECHNIQUE

IMAGINE YOUR PAIN CONTROL ROOM

In addition to the self-hypnosis techniques you've now had a chance to review, imagining a pain control room is a useful tool to memorize.

The pain control room can be a very useful environment that you can return to whenever you need. You may also return to the previous two methods of dealing with pain by reading through them a few times and feeling the benefit of the exercises.

Scale

You will want to remain aware of your pain level by using a measurement scale from zero to ten. Keeping track of these numbers is an important way for you to fully realize your progress. Recording the scale of your pain in a journal where you can also include the date, time, and shape and color of the pain is also useful.

Comfort

Get your body into a comfortable position and remind yourself that breathing is your best friend. Being conscious of your breathing will bring you back to a state of control and activate the relaxation response. Take a deep breath in from your diaphragm (belly breathing) and slowly breathe out, breathing in relaxation and exhaling any tension you feel, making your exhalation very slow. You will naturally become more relaxed. Breathing out slowly activates the relaxation response system. Do this three times: take a deep breath in from your diaphragm to the count of four and a slow, thorough breath out to the count of eight. If you feel you aren't relaxed, use the following deepening technique.

Deepening

Imagine a stairway of 10 steps that you've created from whatever materials and colors that please you. See and feel yourself slowly walk down the 10 steps to the bottom and, with each step visualize your feet, the steps and the deepening of your relaxation. You can see that the bottom of the stairway leads to a door, the door to your special room. You'll want to feel very relaxed by the time you walk down to this door and open it.

Your Personal Room

Let your attention be focused for the next 10 minutes on imagining a personal room that you create to control your pain. This is your room: safe, comfortable, and quiet. Read this section all the way through and then close your eyes and use the description to create your room.

Enter

At the bottom of the staircase, you enter a room where there is a large, comfortable chair that feels custom made just for you. You sit down and notice in front of you, about 18 inches away, a dashboard of levers, dials, and switches. Above the dashboard is a large computer screen where the results of maneuvering these devices will be viewed.

As you look over the dashboard you notice a dial labeled "pain received." This dial acts like a dimmer switch or volume control, and by turning it left or right you can adjust the amount of pain you allow yourself to receive. The dial goes from zero to ten.

Since this is a room constructed just for you, there are labels specific to your needs and your pain attached to all the adjustment devices. Notice these labels and see them clearly. You can see the numbers on each device, labeled from zero to ten.

Controls

You can create as many controls as you like: a control for sharp pain, a control for dull, persistent pain, and any other control you want to include. There's a switch to make everything brighter and more cheerful, and a switch that creates a comforting dimness to soothe you. Try it now. Turn the volume control for your pain level. You have already created a scale for pain, and these controls are scaled the same way, only here you can experiment and control your level of pain. Look at the screen in front of you. Find the area that shows your overall pain level. What does it say? If it's a seven, then go ahead and turn the dial for overall pain down to six and see how this feels. Next, turn the dial down to five and see how this feels, and so on, until you feel relief. As you continue to notice the labels and dials, you can see that you have control over as much of your body in as much detail as you want. In some areas there may be just a subtle change and in others, a marked change. The important thing is to remain curious within your room. Give yourself permission to control as much detail about your body and pain as you want. You will be returning to this room many times and each time, you can change

it as needed.

Record a Message

Next, notice the stereo speakers on either side of the dashboard. Right now they're silent, but soon you will record a message on the microphone positioned to the right of the pain control dial. You'll play this recorded message the next time you enter the room. This message will inform your conscious and unconscious mind that you are continuing to achieve the control you desire and will remind you what you've already accomplished.

Your Body as the Pain Room

No two times are exactly the same in your room. You will control your nervous system, your neural pathways, and the nature of the chemicals released in your body. Each time you repeat your experience you will be deeply aware of how your brain and body work together. You will change your perception of the pain or discomfort in your body and feel in control, becoming able to adjust the various levels, until the time comes when you can actually reduce the nerve impulses so your next experience will be a confident awareness of less pain.

SUMMARY

Pain is complicated. We are all unique and feel pain differently. Past experience of pain and trauma are strong influencers, and how others see you can also influence your pain. You may begin to feel isolated, invisible, and helpless. Medicine has made enormous strides in the last 20 years to respect pain and treat it as a condition unrelated to the event that caused it. Hypnosis has proven very effective for pain relief.

1. Learn to visualize colors, training your mind to gain control over the experience of pain.
2. Learn to use the breathing technique as an essential path to relaxation.
3. Learn to use the "I am" technique, training your mind to focus and de-focus, and allowing you to choose how you will feel, be, and react.
4. Memorize the cold stream story and the object of pain story, making changes to them to fit your own situation.
5. Create a control room just for you. Make it full of details, and visit it often.
6. In all cases, give your pain a rating on a scale from zero to ten.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This ebook is a brief example of information I've found to be helpful for pain relief in my hypnosis practice. The techniques described within are used in many forms throughout the practice of hypnosis.

The people who continue to inspire me are many, but in particular and especially, John Overdurf (www.johnoverdurf.com) my coach and mentor, and Kirsten Farris (www.kirstenfarris.com), my coach and motivator. They have been compassionate teachers and friends for the past six years.

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