3 Activities You Can Enjoy With Chronic Pain

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Chronic Pain Activities

In my experience, living with daily pain can feel very limiting, but there are chronic pain activities that are easier on your body than others.

Physically, there are activities I can no longer participate in without increasing my pain levels or triggering painful flare-ups. The list of activities I can no longer do includes:

- Working.
- Typing.
- Holding a book to read.
- Running.
- Camping.

Not being able to perform these activities can often feel like you are confined to a box. In this situation, I found it liberating to discover new activities that I can do even while I am still in pain. In fact, distraction is a valid pain management tool.

The Link Between Mental Distractions and Pain

A recent study published in Science Daily found, "mental distractions actually inhibit the response to incoming pain signals at the earliest stage of central pain processing."

In the study, participants either completed an easy or difficult memory task while the burning heat was applied to their arms. Participants who completed the hard memory test, which was more mentally distracting, perceived less pain. A functional MRI scan of their spinal cord showed less nerve activity compared to the group doing the easy memory task. The researchers concluded that these results show "just how deeply mental processes can go in altering the experience of pain."

This study indicates the importance of finding low-key activities that you can enjoy even while you are in pain.

Using Activities for Chronic Pain Management

Over the past few years, I have discovered some different activities that have helped me to expand my horizons and manage my pain using distraction. I hope that you find some of these suggestions useful for making the most of your time, even if you are in pain.

1. Learn Something New

Can we be honest about something for a minute? I'm a complete nerd, and I have discovered that most people

have at least one topic that makes them geek out.

Learning is good for brain health, and it can also boost feelings of well-being and self-esteem. There are many ways to learn new things from the comfort of your home. Websites like Coursera and Open Culture offer free online courses ranging from art, archaeology, math to music, and there are thousands of options to explore.

I recently discovered the world of podcasts, which has quickly become a staple activity that I turn to on high-pain days. The great part about audio is that you can lie down and rest in the most comfortable position while you learn.

The variety of podcasts out there is almost overwhelming, and there is something for everyone, whether you are into the news, a sports fanatic, gossip addict, policy fanatic or anything else!

2. Transport Yourself to Another World

Who doesn't love a good story? Books, TV shows and movies are all visible forms of distraction for people living with chronic pain. While you probably already have thought of these options, I want to share a few tips from my own experience that may give you some new ideas to try.

Reading a book may be a challenge, depending on your chronic pain condition. Whether physically holding the book is painful, or reading the words on the page causes fatigue or a headache, a paperback may not always be practical.

Enter the amazing world of audiobooks. Audiobooks are a recording of a text being read by a talented narrator, and this the perfect activity when you are in pain. Your local library may have an online audiobook library where you can temporarily download free audio books from a digital content service, without having to check them out from a local branch.

LibriVox is a free, legal, online audiobook streaming service with hundreds of classic books that are all read by volunteers. Audible and similar companies sell audiobooks from their vast online libraries, which you can download or play using their app.

Binge-watching is a tried-and-true method for getting through a bad pain episode. Many people with chronic pain really want Netflix and chill. Unless you have been living under a rock, you probably already know about Netflix and all the other streaming services out there.

3. Tune Out

Music is a powerful tool for managing chronic pain and depression.

A study reported in Science Daily recently found that listening to music for an hour a day reduced chronic pain by up to 21% and depression by 25%. Importantly, participants in the study described feeling more in control of their condition and less disabled by it.

Personally, when I am feeling more alert I listen to my favorite albums, and when I'm feeling fatigued I relax to music specifically designed to help people fall asleep.

When I find focusing on one thing impossible because of my pain, I sometimes find playing background music can be helpful and used as a pain distraction strategy.

If you want to discover new artists or enjoy music without the cost of buying new albums, you should try free music streaming apps and websites. These sites let you legally listen to music without a paid subscription.