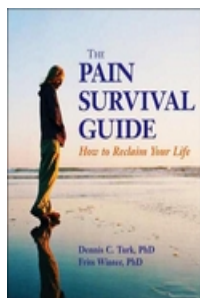




How Do You Solve a Problem Like Algesia?

A review of



The Pain Survival Guide: How to Reclaim Your Life

by Dennis Turk and Frits Winter

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006. 203 pp. ISBN 1-59147-049-8.
\$19.95

Reviewed by
[Beverly Field](#)

☰ *The Pain Survival Guide: How to Reclaim Your Life* is a clearly written, patient-focused, behavioral medicine approach to the management of chronic pain. As the authors state in the introduction, patients are too often told by their doctors that they must just learn to live with their pain without being provided with the tools, skills, or assistance needed for managing this task. Turk and Winter's combined clinical and academic expertise in the field of chronic pain forms the basis for their broad-ranging understanding of the impact of chronic pain on a person's life. They address pain, as well as the multiple losses that are often the consequences of pain and physical limitations, and provide guides for obtaining the tools and skills needed to reclaim a meaningful life. Topics related to areas of loss include physical losses (such as deconditioning, sleep disturbance, and weight changes), social consequences (such as changing roles within family and the impact of pain on friendships), and personal losses, including changes in feelings of self-worth and self-image.

☰ This guide is divided into 10 sections, or lessons. Each lesson has a specific focus that includes background information on the problem being addressed, skills for managing the problem, anticipated "traps" or setbacks, and assignments for incorporating the skills presented. In addition, supplemental reading for each lesson is provided, as is research supporting the cognitive-behavioral approach for management of pain. The first lesson is an introduction to chronic pain and includes an introduction to theories that guide understanding and treatment of pain, common myths about pain, and types of treatments available. Patients are actively brought into the process with an opening assessment of the multiple factors that may be influencing their pain. The second through fourth lessons deal with pacing activity and building endurance, how to use rest and relaxation techniques, coping with fatigue, and developing meaningful activities to deal with boredom and feelings of meaninglessness. The fifth through eighth lessons address the impact of pain on family and friends (ways to improve communication, dealing with intimacy and relationships); how behavior is changed; how thinking influences pain perception and coping; and ways to improve self-confidence (acknowledging limitations, learning to speak assertively, and developing problem-solving skills). The ninth and tenth lessons summarize gains and address ways to deal with relapses and flares.

☰ *The Pain Survival Guide* could be used independently as a self-management resource by a person with chronic pain. It is easy to read, well organized, and free of medical or psychological jargon. Theories, such as positive reinforcement and cognitive restructuring, are briefly and clearly explained in the lessons directed toward changing behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. This guide is also appropriate for use with other treatment approaches, such as physical therapy, prescription medications, and medical procedures. *The Pain Survival Guide* could be used by a physician who finds that previous attempts to manage pain have been inadequate to the extent of his or her patient's problem. Or a therapist, working with a patient with chronic pain, might use *The Pain Survival Guide* as a basis for individual or group therapy sessions. With a pain patient referred for treatment of depression, it would be important to understand and treat the

multiple sources from which depression might arise, and these factors are clearly laid out in this book.

☞ Turk and Winter's guide is an excellent addition to the patient-focused manuals available, such as Jamison's (1996) *Learning to Master Your Chronic Pain* and Caudill's (2002) *Managing Pain Before It Manages You*. What it provides to a greater extent than the other guides is a more extensive discussion of the bases or theories underlying the problems being addressed and more emphasis on the multiple factors that influence each lesson area. If there is any negative to this book, it is the sheer density of information. As I read through the guide I couldn't help but wonder whether a patient, paralyzed by feelings of hopelessness and apathy, wouldn't find the density of information daunting. On the other hand, a person struggling with chronic pain who can work through this guide slowly and persistently will find understanding, a sense of hope, and a well-defined path to reclaiming life.

References

Caudill, M. A. (2002). *Managing pain before it manages you*. New York: Guilford Press.

Jamison, R. N. (1996). *Learning to master your chronic pain*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Exchange.

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