

Acceptance

Learning to live life with chronic pain can be extremely challenging. People are often told they should “learn to live with it”, “get on with it”, or “just accept it”.

But what does it mean to “accept” chronic pain?

‘Acceptance’ can be defined as a way of addressing a situation or experience that is unchangeable. It’s not the same as giving up, helplessness, defeat, or passive resignation, and does not mean that we ‘like’ the situation. Accepting that we have pain is very different to giving up all hope.

Chronic pain can often be associated with a struggle to remove the pain or suffering caused by the pain. It can be easy to become stuck on focusing on removing the pain BEFORE focusing on other aspects of life, or before other aspects of life can be enjoyed.

It may be very difficult to move on while also having chronic pain. It can almost seem like carrying an overloaded suitcase up a steep mountain, or having an elephant strapped to our shoulders as we walk up a long flight of stairs. Acceptance of chronic pain involves dropping the struggle with our pain.

Acceptance enables us to stop fighting the pain, to stop spending energy trying to push it away, and allows us instead to focus this energy and time on doing things that make life rich and meaningful for us. This does not mean we have to like the pain.

Acceptance is an ongoing process of learning to live life fully and completely, without trying to change the problems which are so often outside of our control. This requires taking action in line with what is important to us whilst still experiencing difficult life challenges, such as chronic pain.