



Building Your Path Back to Wellness Workbook

Welcome to your workbook. Please print it off and use it.

Please note, you don't have to follow each question from one to the next, but please do read the handbook prior to the questions.

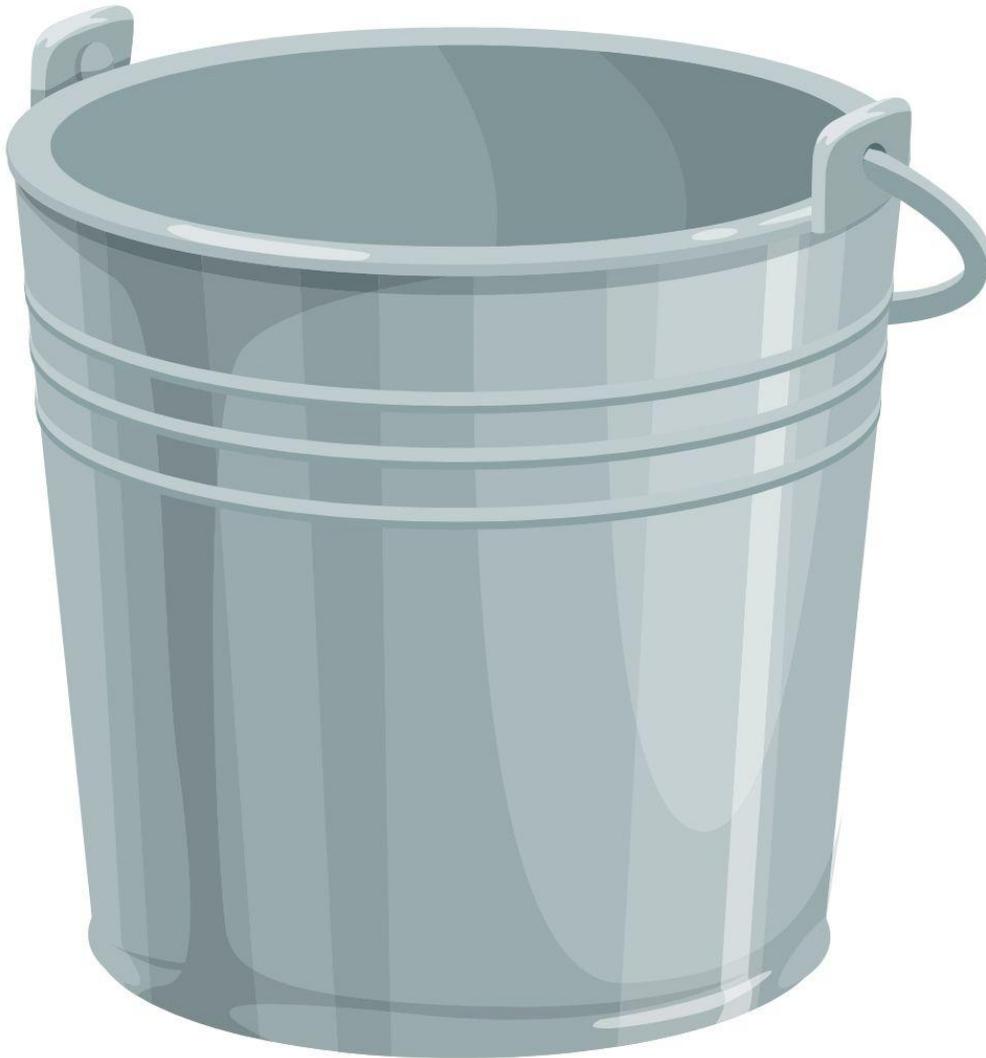
First question

**If you had no pain tomorrow, what would you do?
How would that make you feel?**

Feel free to draw it, write it, cut out photos and paste them here.

Your Bucket

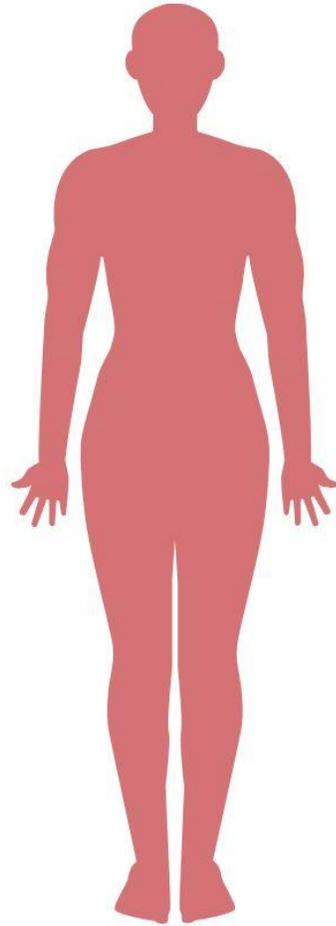
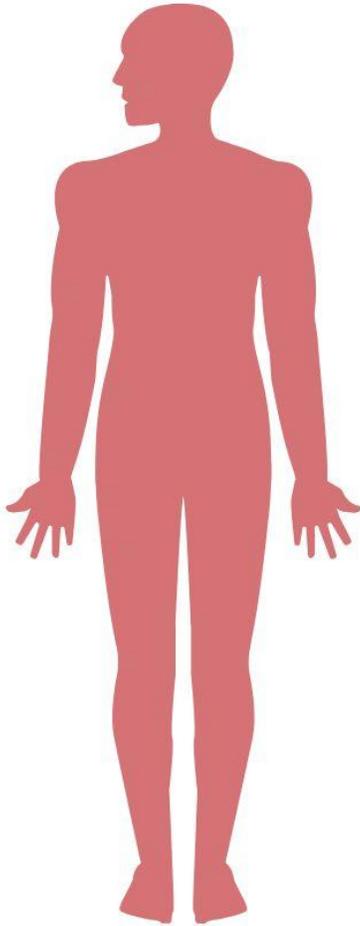
Write down your stresses, your overload, the constant list that is on your mind, the challenges you face, workload, challenging relationships, and any other ideas that you find may trigger you.



Now, look at what you've written down and circle the ones that you can control. Keep those in mind as we work on building skills to create better habits, better communication skills, and calming the nervous system as you'll likely notice these bucket items are triggers for the nervous system protection.

Language

Use these images to start drawing or writing out adjectives of your pain experience.



Sleep Hygiene

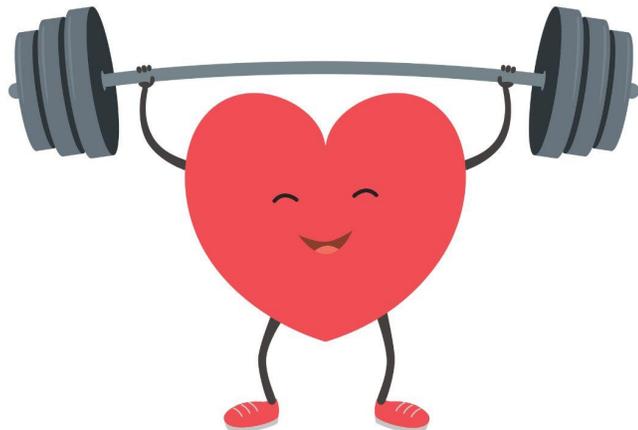
Place a big check mark on two of the boxes that you think will be the easiest habits to start. Work on those 2 habits for 2 solid weeks. One week three, pick one more box.

<p>Go to bed & get up in the morning at the same time everyday.</p> <p>What time is ideal for you?</p>	<p>Put away your tablet, shut off your TV, leave your phone alone from 8:30pm to one hour after you wake.</p> <p>Let's do it!</p>
<p>What is your ideal evening routine?</p>	<p>Get outside during the day and get your body moving!</p> <p>Exercise & nature is so helpful to sleep.</p>
<p>Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and smoking before bed.</p> <p>What time works for you?</p>	<p>Don't eat a heavy meal before bed.</p> <p>Can you eat dinner before 7pm? Maybe even 6pm?</p>
<p>Let's build up your movement routine.</p> <p>Exercise throughout the day is awesome, but don't do high intensity before bed.</p>	<p>Go to bed when you are tired. If you are feeling wide awake... take the time to sit, read, and/or journal; or do something easy & calming in a lower level of light.</p>

Mindset of Stress

Use these graphics and write down anything you can think of that would be GOOD stress for your brain, and GOOD stress for your heart.





Your Support Team

Do you work with a physical therapist? Massage? Physio? Chiro? Dr?
Acupuncture?

Now that you've been learning more about pain, what questions do you have for them? What do you feel they can do to help you during treatments?

Write down a few questions here:

Who in your immediate family & friends do you feel you can talk to? Who is your biggest supporter?

Ask someone to hold you accountable for this 6 week program.

Is there anyone who you don't feel is in your cheering circle?

Your Nervous System

Alright, with all that you've been learning, let's name your nervous system. I basically call mine 'Dude', but giving it a name is like having an alter ego, someone who is trying to protect you, but just hasn't understood the assignment.

What is a simple sentence that you can use to talk to _____ and help to diffuse any triggering situations?

Ex. "This is just a thought, not a fact." or "I'm not going down that road."

Congratulations! You've gotten this far!

Use this space to write down your wins, the times the light switch has gone off and you've been able to use the skills we've been working on.

Share this with your accountability partner!



Building Good Habits

Getting to Know Your Limbic Brain

This part of your brain sits deep in the center of your skull and it's responsible for the functions of your most basic survival. On the timeline of human evolution, your limbic brain is the part of your brain that's been around the longest. Because of this, you'll often see it referred to as the "lizard brain" or "caveman's brain."

Your limbic brain controls things like your breathing, heart rate, body temperature, and you're responding to stress or danger by engaging your "fight or flight" response. Basically, the part of your nervous system that is working too much to protect you.

When our limbic brain is engaged and driving our decision making, we become the most anxious, impulsive, irrational version of ourselves. This is why it's so important that we start to understand our limbic brain better and start to recognize when it's taken over.

Use this worksheet to become more familiar with your own limbic brain.

What are you typically **thinking** when your limbic brain is in control? For example, "I don't care, I just want it," or "I must have this," or "I can't do this,"

How do you typically **feel** when your limbic brain is in control? For example, anxious, worried, agitated, irritable, etc.

How do you typically **act** when your limbic brain is in control? For example, selfish, impulsive, reckless, frozen, etc.

Imagine your life three years from now if you allow your limbic brain to continue to hijack and control so many of your choices so that you're almost constantly thinking, feeling, and acting in this way. What will your life be like? Who will you be?

Dopamine Trap

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in *cravings*. Dopamine is part of the prehistoric (or reptilian) reward center of your brain and this part of your brain is focused on one thing – keeping you alive.

As a result, dopamine doesn't make you feel good; it makes you feel like you're just *about* to feel good. The promise of happiness – not the actual experience of happiness – is the brain's strategy to keep you hunting, gathering, and working so you stay alive. Dopamine is there to get you to ACT and to REPEAT behaviors associated with staying alive (e.g. eating high-calorie foods, feeling connected to the “tribe” on social media, accumulating resources via gambling or shopping).

When you're in the Dopamine Trap, satisfaction is elusive. You might eat something sugary or spend half an hour scrolling through Instagram or buy a new pair of shoes, but rather than feeling happy and relaxed, you feel like you just want MORE.

Try this 2-step strategy to avoid and/or resist the Dopamine Trap:

STEP ONE: Notice the gap between what the behavior promised and what it delivered

Become more mindful of when the dopamine receptors in the reward center of your brain are calling the shots and making you *believe* that something is going to make you feel amazing, but will actually leave you feeling frustrated, guilty, anxious and just wanting more.

There is growing evidence that when people pay close attention to the experience of false reward, the magic spell wears off. If you force your brain to reconcile what it *expects* from a reward (happiness, bliss, satisfaction) with what it *actually* experiences (guilt, shame, anxiety) your brain will eventually adjust its expectations.

So, when you give in to a craving, instead of beating yourself up and promising to do better next time, spend some time sitting with, and really absorbing, how you feel. Simply notice that part of your brain thought that doing would feel really satisfying but it actually feels unsatisfying and even a little anxiety-inducing.

How I imagined the food/behavior would make me feel:

How it actually made me feel:

STEP TWO: Seek out serotonin-boosting activities

Serotonin is another neurotransmitter, but unlike dopamine, it actually *does* create feelings of satisfaction, contentment, and happiness.

Pay attention to the things in your life that release serotonin in your brain and actually DO make you feel good (these will be different for everyone).

These are usually things like spending time with people you love, exercise, being outdoors, yoga, reading, creative arts, etc. They may not be as exciting for your brain as those activities that release dopamine, but they actually DO lead to deep feelings of happiness and satisfaction – the reptilian part of your brain just doesn't know it yet.

List 5 activities that you know make you feel happy and satisfied:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What can you do right now to start spending a bit more time each day or week doing one or more of these activities?

This is just one step in the right direction.

It gives you a bigger picture of why it feels so challenging to break habits that we know are not serving our best selves.

Habit Mapping

Habits all follow the same structure. You encounter a cue (this could be something external like a time of day or a particular person, or it could be something internal like a particular thought or feeling), this triggers a routine (this is the behavior that you want to stop), which delivers a reward. Getting that reward teaches your brain to repeat that same routine the next time you encounter that cue and this creates what is known as a Habit Loop.

The key to reprogramming any habit loop is to keep the cue and reward and replace the routine with something more effective and productive.

Choose a habit that you currently have that you'd like to change (e.g. night-time snacking):

Next, identify the **CUE** (e.g. feeling exhausted and depleted at the end of a long day):

The **ROUTINE** (e.g. eating low-quality snacks at night):

And finally the **REWARD** (e.g. some sense of “filling your cup” or caring for yourself and the dopamine “high” that comes with eating some combination of sugar, fat, and salt):

Now consider some options for different ROUTINES that you could try when you encounter that cue that might deliver the same or a similar reward (e.g. making a warm cup of herbal tea and listening to a relaxing guided meditation).

Now, let's start looking at a few things in more detail.

You've learned about the biomedical model of pain, basically that it is structural and can be fixed. You've also learned that there is a psychosocial aspect to treating chronic pain.

What ideas of your pain do you still hold that are biomedical?

Are these thoughts helpful or harmful?

How do they make you feel?

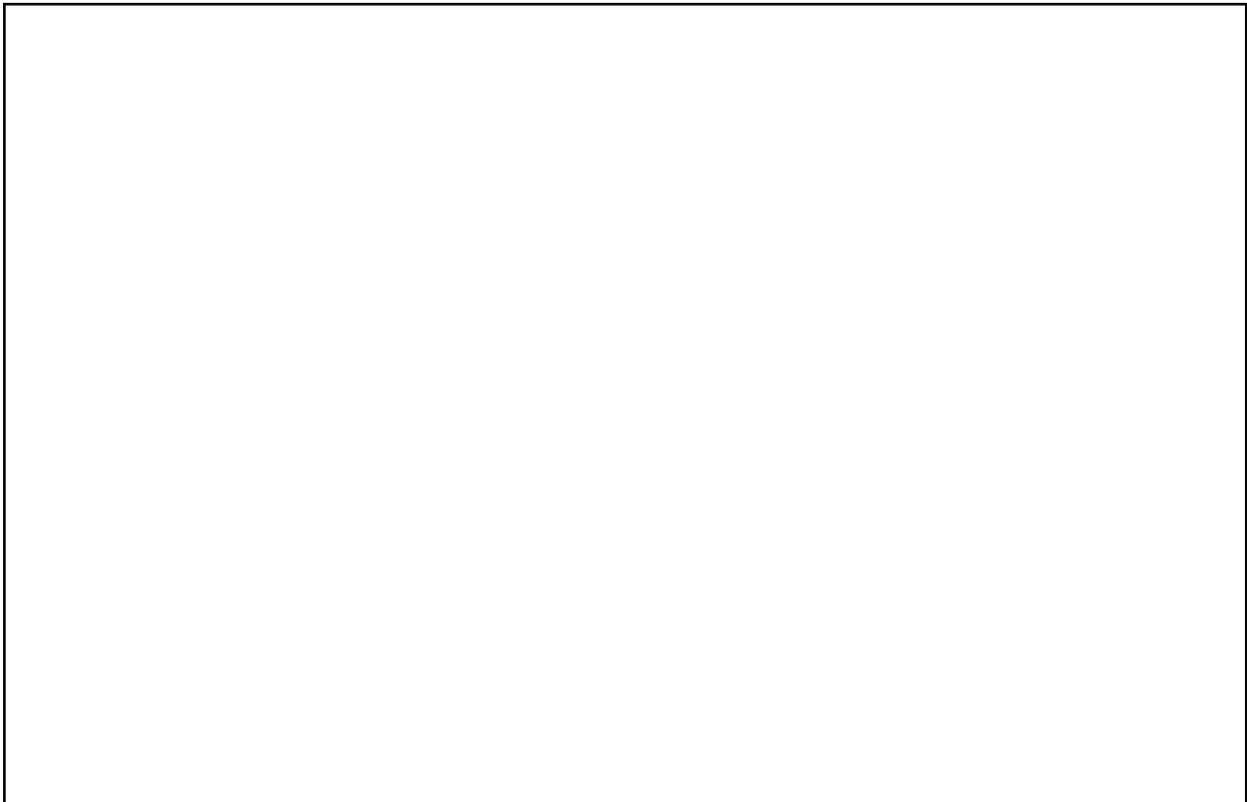
It's important to seek biomedical solutions for pain and illness, and hopefully you've found some great providers and tools that have helped. However, these thoughts are a trap because pain isn't purely biomedical.

Instead, chronic pain is biopsychosocial, the product of biological, psychological, and social factors that create and maintain a cycle of suffering. Continuously seeking exclusively biomedical explanations and treatments keeps you stuck in a cycle of anxiety and disappointment when pain doesn't resolve.

Chronic pain isn't just in the body; it's also in the brain. Effectively treating chronic pain requires addressing all parts of this biopsychosocial issue, including thoughts, emotions, and coping behaviors.

What evidence have you noticed that your pain sensations are more about coming from an overprotective nervous system rather than from tissue damage?

Reflect on your nervous system. Write a short letter to it and talk about how you can forgive it for trying too hard. Let it know that you understand how it happened, and that you'll be making some changes from here on out.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write a letter to their nervous system. The box is positioned below the reflection prompt and occupies the lower half of the page.

Make a list of 5 things that are going well in your body today:

That is it! Great work!
You've reached the end, with one more journal entry to make...

Write down what has changed in your life, have other's noticed any changes?
Share this with your accountability partner. :)