

Health and Behavior Therapy

To improve your quality of life

This handout answers questions about health and behavior therapy. This therapy may be helpful for people who have chronic health problems such as pain or fatigue.

What is health and behavior therapy?

Health and behavior therapy is one way to help treat long-term (*chronic*) problems such as pain, fatigue, and other physical symptoms. The goal of this therapy is to **increase quality of life and decrease suffering even with pain, fatigue, or other physical symptoms.**

This therapy is not *psychotherapy*, which addresses mental health problems. In health and behavior therapy, you will identify and modify thoughts and behaviors that relate to your **physical** problems. If needed, you can also see a psychotherapist for mental health concerns.

How does this therapy work?

Health and behavior therapists use many different methods. One of these is *cognitive behavioral therapy* (CBT). CBT includes:

- **Behavior modification**
such as *graduated exercise*, *pacing*, and adding *rewarding behaviors* to your daily activity plan
- **Cognitive restructuring**
such as identifying and changing thought patterns that may make your symptoms worse

Other methods used in health and behavior therapy include:

- *Relaxation training*
- *Mindfulness meditation*
- *Acceptance and commitment therapy*



Your therapist will use different methods to help you reach your goals.

Your therapist will give you tasks to do between sessions. Doing this “homework” will help you gain your new skills more quickly. This will help you make faster progress.

What can I expect?

- Your first visit will last 1 hour. Your therapist will ask about your health concerns and other issues in your daily life. You will also talk about your usual thinking and behavior patterns (your *psychosocial* history). At the end of this first session, you and your therapist will talk about a treatment plan to help meet your goals.
- Follow-up sessions last 30 to 60 minutes. How often you have these sessions will depend on your needs, goals, and limitations (such as how far you need to travel to get to the clinic). Some people have sessions every 1 to 2 weeks. Others see the therapist once a month.

What will *not* happen in this therapy?

Your therapist will *not*:

- Tell you that your symptoms are “all in your head”
- Prescribe medicine for you
- Replace your other treatments
- Try to diagnose any mental health conditions

Is this therapy right for me?

All illnesses and injuries involve both the body and the mind. Health and behavior therapy has helped people with a wide range of health issues, from cancer to traumatic injury to issues that cannot be diagnosed.

You will gain the most from this therapy if you:

- Truly want to explore how physical distress, behaviors, and thought patterns are related
- Are open to understanding how your thoughts and behaviors can impact your quality of life

Our offer of health and behavior therapy does not mean that we think your symptoms are “all in your head.” We offer this therapy to you because it has been very helpful for people with health concerns like yours.

Who provides health and behavior therapy?

Our Rehabilitation Psychologist provides this service. Psychologists are regular members of the pain team. They work with patients who have pain and chronic illness.

How can I learn more before my first visit?

There are many good books that explain how health and behavior therapy helps people manage chronic pain. Most methods that are used for treating chronic pain also work for other chronic conditions – but, books have not been written for each specific health problem.

To learn more, check out these books:

- *Managing Chronic Pain: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Approach (Treatments That Work)*, by John D. Otis, PhD
- *Managing Pain Before It Manages You*, by Margaret A. Caudill, MD, PhD, MPH
- *Less Pain, Fewer Pills*, by Beth Darnall, PhD
- *Living Beyond Your Pain: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Ease Chronic Pain*, by Joanne Dahl, PhD, and Tobias Lundgren, MS
- *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*, by John P. Forsyth, PhD, and Georg H. Eifert, PhD
- *The Pain Survival Guide: How to Reclaim Your Life*, by Dennis C. Turk, PhD, and Frits Winter, PhD

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your pain clinic if you have questions or concerns.

- Harborview Pain Clinic:** 206.744.7065
- UWMC Center for Pain Relief:** 206.598.4282