

## The Pain Cycle Chart

The information contained in the chart on the last page was acquired by talking to thousands of patients and professionals in clinics along the routes I walked in 2005 and 2006. It represents my conceptual understanding of what the Pain Cycle is, how we enter it, flow through it, *and many times*, end up stuck in it.

You will notice that this chart has three sides:

1. **The Negative**
2. **“Swinging the Curve”**
3. **The Positive**

The negative could also be called **“Falling in”** and the positive, **“Re-invention.”**

### **The Negative Side**

The entrance to the Pain Cycle is the negative side. We tend to enter or “fall in,” and immediately start tumbling due to an injury or the onset of disease. Some injuries set off a chronic pain condition while other diseases have chronic pain as one of the symptoms.

The negative side is distinguished, and exacerbated, mostly by loss. If you look at the chart, you will notice how these losses are a natural effect of constant and chronic pain. Loss of social activities, loss of a job, finances, security, family and friends, and eventually, loss of self-identity and worth.

Loss is always naturally accompanied by grief. So it stands to reason that if we do nothing to deal with the grief, or to deal with the

stages of grief, we will forever be stuck in one of the damaging stages. Each stage of loss on the chart below has its own road – a road to despair, a milder road and then roads leading to deeper and deeper depressions, which can have tragic ends.

Being stuck in any of these stages leaves you in stagnation, and such stagnation can be an angry, bitter existence. If you're clever enough to put up with all the losses and have even accepted the loss of your identity, there's a chance that you've adopted the attitude:

“Oh well, I guess I'm stuck with this. I can't work. I can't be with my friends, and they don't want to be with me. My family doesn't believe me, my insurance dropped me and I have become my pain. Somehow I'll get by, but I will just have to live with pain and deal with all that is gone. It won't be a good thing or a happy life.”

*Does this sound familiar?*

You are resigned to your fate. You try to sound like you've accepted it, but in reality, you are running from it. You are now existing: you are not living. In essence, you found a way to survive but with no quality. If you do nothing to deal about with the grief of your many losses you probably will end up depressed, angry and bitter. You will never enjoy things again or ever be truly happy. This is **resignation**.

### **“Swinging the Curve”**

“Swinging the curve” implies that you are not really dealing with the phases of loss and grief, but rather readying yourself to deal with them. Before any battle, a warrior must prepare mentally, physically and emotionally. It is the same for pain. Before you can tackle and win the war against your pain, you must prepare on all levels.

This is a battle like none you've ever fought before. Preparing yourself for this fight means giving up your old notions of how to fight. You need to learn new ways by thinking differently and being open to new ideas. You will need an open mind. I am going to repeat

myself because this is critical to breaking through the Pain Cycle: YOU WILL NEED AN OPEN MIND.

This will help prepare you for your first major attitude adjustment – surrendering.

### **Surrender**

Do not look at surrendering as giving up. You must never give up. You should also not view it as accepting that it's okay bad things have happened to you. It's not okay. To surrender does not mean throwing in the towel and refusing to fight either.

Instead, it is the beginning of a different way of fighting – a new type of arsenal against the pain. You are, after all, a pain patient who is suffering. The last thing you need right now is to be fighting against the tide. Like swimming upstream, you expend a lot of energy and get nowhere. This will only wear you out and make you very tired, as if you're not tired enough.

Surrendering is learning to go with the flow. “Do what you can when you can.” It is accepting what you cannot change while also understanding that there is still so much you do not know. You have an upcoming battle to fight; it is the battle of your life. Don't rush into it. I promise you the fight will be there tomorrow and even next week. What you need to do first is gather your tools, or weapons in your arsenal, and adopt a new attitude. This attitude will be your war cry. Repeat it to yourself now.

*I will do what I can when I can, and I will stop unintentionally hurting myself further.*

### **Forgiveness**

Being able to forgive is another important attitude to adopt. As with surrender, forgiveness does not mean naïvely thinking that what happened in the past is okay. It's not. Yet ignorance about pain, both physical and emotional, is far too common and sadly hinders your ability to continue forward.

Forgiveness is finding a way to let go of the charge you hold on the past. What happened has happened; what's done is done. Therefore, if you plan on marching forward to face this enemy called pain, you first have to move forward. And it starts with facing the demons from the past.

Learn from the past, forgive yourself and forgive others. Realize everyone is to blame in some capacity for what has occurred. You made decisions out of guilt, exasperation or misinformation. Family and friends made decisions out of fear of seeing you frail or weak or the inability to communicate concerns. Employers and the medical field made decisions out of lack of belief or healthcare politics.

As you see, we all have reasons, whether justified or not, for the way events were handled. Holding onto the anger is not going to change the past. Forgive. Forgive for your health.

## **Belief**

A belief is the single strongest energy in the universe. No one can stop your belief except you.

Once you truly grasp how powerful your belief in something is, you're ready to begin the journey. You will become unstoppable. All that matters is your conviction and belief in a goal, an attitude shift, a therapy option, happiness, hope – life.

As long as you can tune out the external naysayers or white noise frequency, no one will ever again be able to dent your armor again. Your life will be yours, and you can focus on being happy and productive again. Your old self, your true spirit, appears. And, like me, **you will be ready to take your walk.**

Just think of the possibilities that exist for you. Maybe you will join me in becoming a pain warrior, teaching those suffering and doctors how to best help our community. You can bring awareness and education about chronic pain treatments to the forefront. You can work on legislative changes. Maybe you want to focus on renewing old friendships or enjoying your family. Maybe it is taking that trip you have been dreaming about for years. Maybe it is working and really loving every moment of it. Whatever your walk is, and wherever it takes you, is up to you. Just believe.

Believe you can move forward in life, happy and productive again, renewed and reinvented – simply enjoying your friends and family, your new work, your new strength and everything you had missed during those years of pain and negativity.

### **The Positive Side – Re-Invention**

This part of the cycle is where all the rest of the cycle makes sense. It is the part where everything starts working together in unison.

Each therapy, medication, complementary treatment, educational experience and spiritual aspects of healing now can be more effective. You have done the work, so you are ready to reap the benefit of having a positive response. Don't get me wrong, though, you still must find the right "mix" that works for you. If I've learned anything from the two years of walking and visiting clinics around the country, it would be that we are all very unique and individual.

This is a lesson we all need to learn: medical professional, caregiver and patient alike. *We are all unique.* Therefore, each of us will have an individualized plan for obtaining relief. This is why, as patients, we must search to find what works for us. As long as a therapy causes non-damaging pain, we should be open to trying every avenue available to us. Just narrow it down to therapies you believe in. Because, as I already discussed and you know, **belief is paramount to success.** If you do not believe in it before trying, there is a high chance it will not be your answer.

We will always have to deal with the negatives as we traverse the medical system. It is unavoidable unless you've been blessed with an adept community of doctors and therapists. Unfortunately, great information is not readily available everywhere. While more in the medical community are seeing the severity of pain and medical conditions, there still seems to be a lack of overall knowledge in this field of medicine. I see change slowly happening, but until that day when doctors nationwide fully address and validate pain, we need to educate ourselves.

This is very important. Listen to your body. Read up on your condition and various treatment options. Communicate with those treating you. Join support groups. Become involved.

*Do what you can, when you can.*

You should feel pride in reaching the positive side of the Pain Cycle. There is a peace of mind that comes with surrendering, forgiveness, belief and “swinging the curve.” You see that the pain may still be there, but you feel lighter and in control. You are you once again.

As you follow along this chart, remember some key things. The negative side is not your fault. I repeat: the negative side of the Pain Cycle is not your fault. We all start there, and it is a process to move beyond it. Furthermore, no one will believe or understand your pain, which is why *you* must. Finally, just keep telling yourself that you don't want to be stuck like this anymore. You don't want pain to control your life any longer.

*I will begin this journey of education and belief so I triumph over the pain to regain my life and my spirit. **I will do what I can, when I can.***

# Pain Starts

# LIFE PATH

Due to injury or disease

## Loss of:

*Social Activity*

*Job*

*Self- Worth*

*Finances*

*Family*

*Friends*

*Reach Your Goal*

*Re-Invent Yourself*

*Spirituality*

*Medicines*

*Treatments*

*Therapies*

## NEGATIVE

Series of Losses

A Natural path

Grief

## POSITIVE

Education

Set **Attainable** Goals

Learn not to Hurt

## Surrender

Not Giving Up, but Giving In

Acceptance of your situation

Stop swimming Upstream

## Forgiveness

Putting the Past in the Past

Moving on with your Life

“Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

## Belief

Believe in Your Power to:

Put Pain in its Place

Be Happy

# Better than you were before Pain