

# Acute Pain Thoughts: Identifying and Replacing Thoughts That Are Not Helpful

Thinking about how much pain you are in does not help you cope with the pain. As pain increases, thoughts may become more negative; as thoughts become more negative, pain often increases further.

Although pain thoughts can be automatic, with practice you can become more aware when you have them. Then you can replace unhelpful thoughts with ones that are helpful. Here are some examples of unhelpful pain thoughts and some coping statements that you can use to replace them:

## Common Acute Pain Thoughts

Types of Unhelpful Thoughts	Examples of Unhelpful Thoughts	Examples of Helpful Thoughts
<b>Catastrophizing:</b> Believing something is the worst it could possibly be.	I just hurt my back, and it will never get better.	Although my back hurts right now, I can use the strategies I've been taught to improve the pain.
<b>Should Statements:</b> Thinking in terms of how things should, must, or ought to be.	This injury never should have happened.	I'm frustrated that this injury happened, but I'm ready to focus on my recovery.
<b>All or None Thinking:</b> Seeing things as "either or" or "right or wrong" instead of in terms of degrees.	I can only resume activities when I am completely pain free.	Many different activities can be helpful for my recovery, even if they are somewhat painful at first.
<b>Overgeneralization:</b> Viewing one or two bad events as an endless pattern of defeat.	I tried running last week and it made the pain worse. I'd better not try it again.	My doctor said that my injury is healing. I'll give running another try, but this time I'll use pacing and rest to not exacerbate the pain.
<b>Jumping to Conclusions:</b> Making negative conclusions of events that are not based on fact.	When I move my back hurts, so it must be bad for me to move.	Just because my back hurts doesn't mean I should not do things I enjoy.
<b>Emotional Reasoning:</b> Believing how you feel reflects how things really are.	I feel useless, so I am useless.	Even though I can't do all the things I used to do, it doesn't mean I can't do anything.
<b>Disqualifying the Positive:</b> Focusing on only the bad and discounting the good.	So what if I make some small improvements? I am still in pain.	Every small improvement helps me to build the life I want to live.

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## Catching ANTs: How to Catch, Check, & Challenge Automatic Negative Thoughts for Acute Pain

When you get upset, you often have negative thoughts. These thoughts may happen automatically and increase your pain and negative mood. You can feel better physically and emotionally by catching ANTs when they occur, noticing how they make you feel, and challenging them with a more balanced thought.

**Identify at least one ANT each day. Evaluate the thought and generate a new helpful one.**

<b><i>Day/Situation</i></b>	<b><i>Catch It! Identify ANT</i></b>	<b><i>Check It! Effect on your pain/mood</i></b>	<b><i>Challenge It! Positive/balanced coping statement</i></b>
<i>Tuesday/Carrying groceries and pain flares</i>	<i>I can't do anything with this pain! What if I'm like this forever?</i>	Helpful or <span style="border: 1px solid red; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">Unhelpful</span>	<i>I am hurting right now, but I can use strategies to help me feel better.</i>
		Helpful or Unhelpful	
		Helpful or Unhelpful	
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		Helpful or Unhelpful	

*Adapted with permission from S. Palyo, Ph.D. & J. McQuaid, Ph.D.*

## Coping Statements for Acute Pain

Here are some statements that can be used to replace unhelpful thoughts. Put an “X” next to the ones that you think may be helpful for you. What things have you told yourself in the past to get through a pain flare or difficult situation? Add your helpful statements to the list.

X	Coping Statement Checklist
	There are many things I can do despite my pain.
	Pain does not always mean that re-injury is occurring.
	The pain flare will pass.
	What would I tell a friend who was in pain?
	If I can make it through this, my body will heal and the pain will improve too.
	I’m not going to put my life on hold due to pain.
	I can focus on something else to distract from the pain.
	I will feel more confident as I gradually return to activity.
	I’m going to focus on what I <i>can</i> do, not what I can’t do.
	I have gotten through this pain before.
	It’s worth it for me to work on my recovery.
	I have the skills I need for my pain.

*Adapted with permission from K.M. Phillips, Ph.D.*

**Remember:** It’s easy to think of helpful statements when you’re feeling okay. But, if you are in a bad mood or having a pain flare, it’s more difficult. Keep a list of these or other helpful statements in a place where you can easily find them when you need them most (e.g., in your wallet, on your refrigerator, in your phone).

