

## Patient information

# Chronic pain self-management

## Negative and positive thinking

Negative emotions can seriously interfere with our ability to cope with pain. Sometimes, when we feel anxious, depressed or angry we are able to identify a particular cause – improving the situation will often help us to feel better.

The first thing to ask yourself is ‘can I do something constructive to improve the situation that I feel bad about?’ If you can see a way of improving things, then you can set that as a goal and begin to take the necessary steps towards achieving it. This may seem an obvious thing to say, but most of us have known times when, having taken a particular course of action, we wondered why we hadn’t tried it earlier.

Just reading this means you are doing something constructive in relation to your pain. But what if you can’t identify the cause or, as with chronic pain, you can identify the cause but you can do little to change it. A crucial lesson for all of us to learn is it is not simply situations that cause anxiety, depression or anger; it’s the way that we perceive the situation that really matters. What we think about a particular thing can have a much more powerful effect than the thing itself.

As a rule, if you focus on your pain it makes it worse. Distract yourself with an interesting activity, enjoyable company or an absorbing television programme. You will notice the pain less. Plan your day so that you have less time to focus on the pain.

*Some people can visualise their pain in a way that helps to control it. One man visualises the pain in his back as being like a number of hot bars of an electric fire. To control his pain he imagines switching each bar off one by one and visualises the glowing orange colour fading to a dull grey.*

