

**Emotional Weight Loss**  
**Dr. Peper's Fall, 2008 Newsletter**

At one time or another, most of us have been on a diet to lose weight. In some cases the weight gain has only existed for a short period of time (e.g., after overindulging over the holidays). In other cases the extra weight has existed for several years. Common strategies for weight loss usually include: fad diets, exercise, developing new eating habits or all of the above. No matter what strategy is employed, success can be elusive.

The concept of weight gain applies to emotions as well. We have all experienced the heaviness of stress, sadness or emotional distress when challenged by difficult life events such as divorce or loss of a loved one. Ideally, the emotional impact of the life event is short-lived and the emotional weight gain is temporary. However, there are also times where the emotional weight gain is maintained because the life event is longer term.

Unfortunately chronic pain is one of the biggest contributors to long-term emotional weight gain. Although chronic pain is a physical condition, patients also experience some degree of negative, heavy emotions that can weigh them down. If not managed properly, the negative emotions associated with a chronic pain condition can lead to chronic emotional weight gain.

How does pain-related emotional weight gain become chronic? Usually when the increased level of pain begins it is considered a temporary situation. The hope is that the right medication, procedure or surgery will "cure" the pain. However, when the pain persists and becomes chronic, emotional weight gain increases and is maintained as patients wonder, "How much more can I take?" or "Will this ever end?"

As many of us have come to know, chronic pain can cause emotional devastation. It changes your life and has a ripple effect that impacts all the relationships you have with others. Over time chronic pain can make you feel overwhelmed, defeated and powerless. The good news is that it doesn't have to. There are things you can do to minimize the emotional weight gain that is associated with a chronic pain condition. The other side of this page provides information that will help you do an Emotional Weight Assessment. It is divided into two steps that (1) help you assess your emotional weight status and (2) help you start working on reducing the emotional weight that you carry due to chronic pain. ...

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Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Rate Your Emotional Fitness Level:

**Emotionally Fit:** You acknowledge that your pain has an influence over your ability to do things and makes plans. You have figured out how to work with it, doing what you can when you can. Your pain gets to you at times making you feel frustrated, anxious or worried about the future. However, these thoughts don't stay with you and you can "bounce back" from this type of thinking. You maintain good relationships with others.

**Marginally Fit:** You struggle in your ability to emotionally deal with your pain. At times you feel like you are maintaining, and other times you feel like you are hanging on by your fingernails. It's hard to keep the emotional weight off. It seems like most of the time you are feeling stressed about your pain and it feels like it's starting to get the best of you. You have some control but you're not sure how much longer you can keep it up if things don't change.

**Unfit:** Your pain has taken over your life. No matter how hard you try, you don't seem to make any progress in dealing with your pain. Your pain sabotages your ability to make plans so you don't bother anymore. You have let relationships go because you seem to keep letting everyone down. You don't feel like yourself anymore and you're at a loss about what else you can do. You usually feel stressed and/or depressed which has caused you to gain a large amount of emotional weight. The weight keeps increasing and although you try, you can't lose it. This category is very harmful to your emotional health and reduces your ability to tolerate pain.

Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Take Steps to Lose Emotional Weight:

**Don't overindulge:** Spending too much time feeling like a burden, unreliable or pain-related guilt and anxiety will contribute to significant emotional weight gain.

**Avoid "junk food" thoughts and feelings:** Beating yourself up for not being able to do things, focusing on what you can't do anymore and worrying about the future are all poor emotional nutrition and contribute to being emotionally unfit.

**Know your weaknesses:** Certain ways of thinking keep you feeling stuck and keep the weight on—instead, identify the negative thoughts you have that contribute to your emotional weight. Once these thoughts are identified, you can work to change them.

**Exercise good thinking skills:** Maintain realistic expectations of yourself, become active in your treatment, find creative ways to work toward overcoming your pain, accept that negative thoughts are normal but find ways to maintain your motivation to move forward.

The information presented in this newsletter is provided as a general starting point for changing your relationship with your pain. We understand that each person is unique and has different ways of adding emotional weight so success is best achieved with the support of individualized treatment. If you are interested in more information, call Kari Kies, behavioral health coordinator at (623) 742-1514 to schedule an appointment with Dr. Peper.