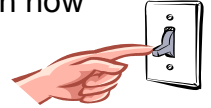


Factors that OPEN the pain gates	Factors that CLOSE the pain gates
<u>Stress, anxiety and muscle tension:</u> When the body tenses up, this opens pain gates, which then makes the pain feel even worse.	<u>Relaxation:</u> Learning to ease the tension, using various relaxation exercises is a great way to close the “stress, anxiety and tension” gate that allowed more pain messages to enter.
<u>Lack of movement:</u> When a person avoids movement, it increases stiffness and decreases fitness. This in turn creates more pain.	<u>Exercise:</u> Exercises help improve fitness and mobility, which in turn, close the pain gates.
<u>Tiredness:</u> Feeling tired can leave your body too weak to control pain. Nausea can also wear you out and make pain worse.	<u>Sleep:</u> Make sure you get enough sleep so that you are able to learn how to cope with pain. The Sleep Hygiene chapter has helpful information on how to improve sleep quality.
<u>Thinking about or focusing on pain:</u> If a lot of thought goes into the painful area, this will likely open pain gates and make the pain feel worse.	<u>Distraction:</u> Distracting yourself from the pain is a good way to close this type of pain gate. For some, more pain is felt at night because there is there isn't much to distract them from it.
<u>No control:</u> When people feel that they have little or no control over their activities, medical procedures, or even their life, their pain controls them, leaving the gates open to more pain.	<u>Taking control:</u> Pacing activities, asking questions during medical procedures, are ways to close these gates. In the long run, this helps control the pain.
<u>Fear of pain:</u> This can cause the body to become very tense and this can increase pain. For example, if you had a bad experience with a blood test, you might end up fearing future blood tests or needles. The tension that builds in the body and the anxiety that builds in the mind can make the whole experience more painful.	<u>Support:</u> Having a loved one near may be the best emotional treatment for pain. You might feel more secure when a family member, friend or spouse is there with you. Their presence may help you cope with the pain.

All of these factors point in one direction. The trick to reducing pain is to **turn off the switches** in your body that control the pain messages. It takes some time to learn how to teach your brain to do this but with some practice, it can be very helpful.



Principles

The different combinations of factors that open and close pain gates change over time. This means that the gate will change in terms of how open or closed it may be.

- For example, if the person with chronic pain manages to exercise, stays reasonably relaxed, and paces activities, the person will be more likely to experience **less** pain. But the person with chronic pain who does not keep fit, and who does nothing to keep busy, is prone to be more tense and will be more likely to experience **more** pain.

This means that what you do (or don't do) can affect the amount of pain that you experience at any one time. It is possible to manage your own pain.