

Oh My Aching ...

*97 Tips for Living Your Best Life While
Managing Chronic Pain*



A gift to you from Corrie Woods
author of
*The Woman's Field Guide to
Exceptional Living*

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A Note from the Author

Dear reader,

I know the face of chronic pain. It has accompanied me over the past few years and has had a profound impact on my life. Along with the challenges and the hard days have come incredible opportunities to grow personally in new, unexpected and joyful ways.

This mini-guide was written to help me navigate unfamiliar territory and I share it with you in hopes that it will provide a map of sorts to ease your way, or that of your loved ones.

I invite you to share your stories and your feedback with me at

corrie@womansfieldguide.com.

I wish you well!

Corrie

If you or someone you love is suffering from chronic pain, this mini-guide is for you.



Recent information from The American Pain Foundation reveals:

- Pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined.
- An estimated 76.5 million people suffer from chronic pain. National Center for Health Statistics Report 2006.
- Though chronic pain plagues people from all walks of life, statistically more women than men suffer from illnesses that involve chronic pain. (National Center for Health Statistics Report 2006.)

The National Institute of Health reports that each year:

- The annual cost of chronic pain in the United States, including healthcare expenses, lost income, and lost productivity, is estimated to be \$100 billion.

What is chronic pain?


Chronic pain is pain that persists past the time usually required to heal from an illness or injury. When you live with chronic pain, it is as if you live through a veil that cloaks much of who you are and how you may want to interact with others. People of all sizes, ages, colors and health conditions experience chronic pain. You might be a breast cancer survivor in recovery, a person whose low back pain will not respond to treatment, a sufferer of postherpetic neuralgia as a result of the complications of shingles, or someone unexpectedly dealing with a Lyme Disease or Chronic Fatigue diagnosis. If you and your family know the face of pain, this guide may be of help to you.

How to use this mini-guide:

- Read through this guide and choose one or two things to focus on each day in order to manage your pain.
- Note the “Gentle Nudges” (actions you can take “right now” as you read this guide), and put the booklet down long enough to do them.
- Re-read it when you hit a slump or are in need of some fresh ideas.
- Share it with loved ones, specifically the section: *Helping Loved Ones to Help You* so they can gain a deeper understanding of what you are going through and how to help.
- Give copies to loved ones who are themselves experiencing pain.

- Share it with an organization or company you are affiliated with where there is a fit.

Helping Loved Ones to Help You

Everyone has different needs. What matters most is that you clearly communicate what your needs are to those who want to help in some way. For them, being the caregiver to someone in chronic pain comes with its own set of unique challenges. See the mini-guide “Self-Care for the Family Caregiver” for further information. As you read along note the tips marked with this symbol: 

These make note of things that may be of particular interest to your caregivers, either representing ways they can help or concepts that may deepen their understanding.




What follows are simple suggestions that you can follow today to begin making a meaningful and measurable difference. Some ideas may be new to you, others may leave you thinking, I am glad to be reminded of that, and there may be some that just don't fit. I encourage you to come back to this guide often for fresh ideas.



Tend To Your Body

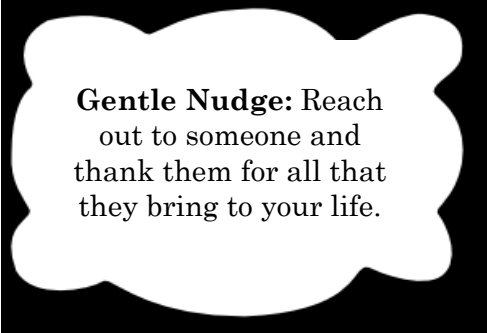
- Make sure to take care of all parts of your body, not just the ones in pain, by giving them attention, staying current with all medical check-ups, and checking in with yourself every so often.
- Keep flexible by stretching often. Whenever you catch your body feeling stiff, identify the area that is tight and gently stretch into it.
- Eat an extraordinarily healthy diet. If you are not sure what that means, learn all about it!
- Be grateful for the body parts that are feeling just fine – thank you very much!
- Look for ways to feel pleasure by exploring gentle new ways to nurture your body daily. Let your pain level dictate what is safe.
- Take long hot baths (more than once a day, if helpful) and leave the guilt behind.
- Rest, rest, rest and do so in creative ways.
- Remember to breathe and breathe deeply to soothe your mind and body.

Gentle Nudge: Take five minutes right now to stretch. How about roll your shoulders, flex your wrists or touch your toes?


- Exercise regularly and keep your body moving. Even if your mobility is limited, movement and exercise in small ways may offer you tremendous benefits.
- Stay hydrated. When your body is in need of water, you can experience fatigue, fuzzy mental capabilities and serious illness.
- Strive to get great sleep. Waking refreshed can make everything about your day more manageable.
- When you feel yourself hitting a slump, wash your face with cool water and give yourself a loving smile in the mirror.
- Practice meditation alone, with a guided CD or a group, learning to be *with* your pain, rather than *being* your pain.
- Use aromatherapy for relaxation. Try different scents for different moods and times of day.
- Delight in some touch therapy by enlisting a loved one to give you a foot rub or by visiting a massage therapist. 

Attitude is Everything





- Focus on what you **can** do rather than on what you cannot. There are always activities you can do, some new, some forgotten.
- Be okay with getting angry, depressed, and frustrated but do not be okay with staying that way. Look for ways to process your way through the tough emotions.
- Allow yourself a good cry.
- Don't put off joy until you *feel good enough*. Look for little moments of joy throughout your day.
- Allow your chronic pain to open compassion to the world of people who suffer. When you focus on compassion for others, it is hard to slide into self-pity (though it's okay to experience that too).
- Expect and accept that on some days you may not be firing on all cylinders, emotionally or physically. Learn to be okay with not being your best self 100% of the time. If you need to, make sure that someone has your back. 
- Grieve your losses. When you suffer from chronic pain, you must adjust many facets of your life – that means you may have to give up certain things formerly important to you.
- Laugh. It stimulates your immune system and enhances your feelings of well-being. 
- Love yourself and love your body, each and every day.





Gentle Nudge: Reach out to someone and thank them for all that they bring to your life.

- Acknowledge and let go of any guilt for how your chronic pain is impacting others. It does not serve them and it does not serve you. 
- Throw yourself a pity party and serve it up with a dose of humor.
- Stay open to life. It's easy to shut down physically and emotionally.
- Create daily affirmations to stay positive. Write them on slips of paper and put them in unexpected places like the silverware drawer or on your bathroom mirror.
- Practice gratitude as often as possible throughout the day by focusing on all the things you have to be thankful for and by expressing your gratitude with others.
- Be willing to receive love. Sometimes it is truly better for you to receive graciously than to give.
- Smile. Take time to make a list of fifty things that make you smile and post it in a conspicuous place. Read it often.
- Practice forgiveness. Anger you may harbor toward others or toward yourself can contribute to further pain.
- Read inspiring books and literature.
- Watch your self-talk: weed out the words and phrases that do not support your overall well-being.
- Don't compare yourself to others.
- When all else fails, ask yourself, "What lesson can I learn today from this experience of pain?"
- Don't "should" yourself. Go easy on yourself 24/7.







Communication

- Don't hesitate to ask for help. 
- Be honest with those around you. They cannot read your mind. When your pain is at its worst, you don't have to complain constantly, but it does help to let those around you know that a raw edge is exposed. 
- Learn to be assertive and to take a stand for yourself. After all, it is your body and you are the best witness to your condition.
- Learn to say "no." Overextending yourself by saying yes to too many things can be a trigger for a pain flare up. 
- Clear the way for unconditional love and support by resolving any misunderstandings or resentments with the people in your life. 

Gentle Nudge: Identify one thing that you need help with and ask a friend or loved one to assist.


- Be a good listener to others. Though you may be in chronic pain, other people in your life may be dealing with their own hardships. Feeling heard and supported is a powerful gift you can give.
- Reach out through your phone, using it as a lifeline to friends and family. Don't just sit and wait for it to ring.
- Seek a new listener for yourself from time to time. It may provide you with fresh perspectives, and it will give your loved one a little break from their role as support person. 
- You may find that everyone has a suggestion regarding ways to manage your pain. Be open, be appreciative for their concern, be willing to say "not now," if the timing is not right and be discerning. 

Support – It is Better to Give and Receive

- Help others with their pain. When you extend your love, support, and prayers to others it can dramatically improve your own well-being.
- Get out of the house to avoid the "hermit syndrome," characterized by shutting yourself in your home and shutting others out of your life. 
- Accept the offers of those who want to provide you with meals or gestures that make life easier. They will benefit from these gifts as much as you do. 
- Never turn down a visit from a loving friend just because your appearance is not perfect. Friends will understand.
- Join a support group, locally or on line. Connecting with others who can relate helps to prevent feelings of isolation.
- Surround yourself with positive people, especially those who are managing their own health challenges successfully. 
- Have a friend or family member attend doctor's appointments with you and take notes. Two sets of ears are better than one. 
- Help educate your loved ones about your pain. The more they understand, the better support they can provide to you. 
- Spend time with children and with pets for a dose of pure joy and magic.
- Find a mentor who has walked a similar road and who understands.
- Be sensitive to the stress your condition may have on your loved ones: encourage them to take time focusing on their own self-care. 



Organize and Simplify Your Life

- Keep your life organized and simplified on all fronts. If need be, hire a professional organizer to help you get on top of things. Clutter and distractions contribute to stress. 

- Create a Pain Management Folder consisting of:
 - A calendar for appointments.
 - A place to write down questions (and record answers) as they come up. Use this to get the best possible help when you meet with healthcare providers.
 - A log of any medications and supplements you are taking, their dosages, and the reason for taking them.
 - A list of all members of your pain management team.
 - A list of all emergency contacts.
 - A summary of your medical history.
- Devise a plan for managing pain flare-ups.
- Set realistic goals. Don't take on too much at any one time and give yourself plenty of time to accomplish your goals. Under-scheduling all aspects of your life can help you adapt to the fluctuation of your pain levels.

Fine-tune Your Environment

- Find a time and place for complete quiet to recharge your batteries.
- Spend time enjoying nature, even if it's looking through a window at a bird feeder.
- Switch from a desktop computer to a laptop. Use it from your bed or couch to stay in touch with friends, stream movies and music, or write in your journal.
- Eat your meals at a table (a well-set table, at that) if at all possible. This creates a change in scenery for you and makes for a more satisfying meal.
- Pamper yourself with fresh flowers.
- Invite the outside in by opening blinds and draperies in your home for at least a part of the day.
- Transform your home or your surroundings into a healing sanctuary with beautiful artwork you adore, pictures of loved ones, comfy furniture, a handmade quilt, etc.
- Unplug from all news for a spell. You'll save yourself from a big dose of "bad news."
- Get a change of scenery, either by taking a trip or by exploring a new place virtually through movies, books, or music.

Gentle Nudge: Do one thing to your home environment to make it feel more cozy and nurturing.

Help Your Healthcare Provider Help You



- Create a pain management healthcare team comprising such essential personnel as your primary doctor, pharmacist, and massage therapist. Keep all their contact information in your Pain Management Folder.

- Track your pain so you can accurately report information to doctors by keeping a pain diary. For a great resource go to:
<http://www.letstalkpain.org/pdf/PAINNotebook.pdf>
- Knowledge is power. Educate yourself and stay current on all treatment options.
- Be open to exploring complementary alternative medicine (CAM) such as acupuncture, massage therapy, hypnosis, yoga, biofeedback, and cognitive behavioral therapy.
- Seek professional mental health counseling; with chronic pain, depression often sets in.
- Write your questions down before all appointments.
- Stay on top of your pain by taking medications, based upon your doctor's advice, when they can give you a break from the pain.
- Take a class on pain management.

Self-Awareness

- Reassess your condition frequently. Are there any lifestyle practices such as smoking, lack of exercise, or stress that are contributing to your pain?
- Recognize how you are compensating, both physically and mentally.
- Check in throughout the day by asking, "Am I in control or is my pain in control?"
- Identify what eases your pain and what intensifies it. Choose accordingly.
- Budget your energy: overextending yourself is a sure-fire cause of pain flare-ups.
- Trust your own judgment and listen to your intuition.
- Fear often comes hand in hand with chronic pain. Be open to acknowledging fear you may be feeling and take steps to move through it rather than avoid it.

Simple Things You Can Do

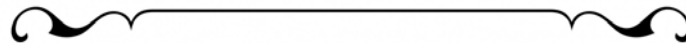
- Make managing your pain the top priority in your life. 
- Take advantage of audio books and DVDs that will take your mind of your pain temporarily.
- Engaging in artwork and creative projects can transform and inform your experience with pain. Learn to draw, to paint, or to stitch. Losing yourself in a creative endeavor may provide a powerful and pleasant method for pain management. It can also offer a way to express your pain when words fall short (as they often do).
- Schedule events or create special occasions to look forward to. 
- Listen to your favorite feel-good music or make your own music.
- Use narrative therapy by writing your way into and through your pain.

- Dress up, get your hair done, or wear a bright color. Looking great on the outside can help you feel good on the inside too.
- Play board or card games, especially those that require you to think logically and cognitively.
- Discover a new passion or hobby.
- Break one bad habit. Having a focus like this can help divert your attention and instill greater self-esteem.
- Design a daily awakening routine that helps you start your day off right. This may include light stretching, drinking a large glass of water, meditation or prayer, etc.
- Write a letter to a loved one. It is a wonderful distraction and will brighten their day.

Gentle Nudge:

Put one thing on your calendar that you will really look forward to.

Resources to Explore



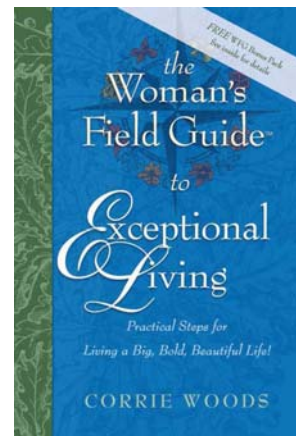
- The American Pain Foundation: www.painfoundation.org
- American Chronic Pain Association: www.theacpa.org
- National Chronic Pain Society, <http://ncps-cpr.net>
- Let's Talk Pain, <http://www.letstalkpain.org/>
- www.ChronicPain.org
- www.PowerOverYourPain.org
- ForGrace – Empowering Women in Pain: <http://www.forgrace.org>
- Guided Imagery for Healing:
<http://www.healthjourneys.com>
<http://www.relaxintohealing.com>
<http://www.thecelticmuse.com/meditation-cd>
- DancingWithPain: <http://dancingwithpain.com>

About the Author



Corrie Woods is an author, an artist, a women's life coach, and a wellness retreat leader. In addition, she is a woman who has experienced chronic pain as the result of a hip injury and Lyme Disease. This mini-guide was written from the heart with the hope that it will ease, in some small measure, the suffering of families in the grips of chronic pain.

To learn more about Corrie and to purchase her award-winning book, *The Woman's Field Guide to Exceptional Living, Practical Steps for Living a Big, Bold, Beautiful Life!* visit www.womansfieldguide.com.



Additional free mini-guides available at the website include:

- *Self-Care for the Family Caregiver, Tips to Help You Survive and Thrive*
- *Self-Care in Your Wisdom Years, A Primer for Women in Mid-Life and Beyond*
- *Gotta Book in You? Tips, Tools and Resources to Coax the Writer in You Out of the Closet*
- *Crafting a Personal Retreat*

and more!

Disclaimer:

This booklet reflects the research and opinions of the author. It is not meant to substitute for, or contradict, the advice of medical professionals. Always consult your healthcare provider before undertaking any changes in your health routine.