MIND-BODY APPROACHES TO PAIN
With Nancy O’Brien

The path will wait while you take the stone from your shoe
Author unknown

THE GIFTS OF PAIN
Adapted from Mary Cook/marycookma.com

Pain can elicit our undivided attention … It can humble us and inspire us to reach out for help … It can increase our sense of empathy and unity with others … give us gratitude … Pain allows us to see light and promise in darkness and despair … Accepting pain … allows laughter to interrupt stress or a loving smile to interrupt physical pain.

COMPASSION IS THE KEY
Listen to your body and support its efforts to find ease

Bring compassionate awareness, morning, noon and night, to your own pain with:
-- Calming breathing practices
-- Meditation, mini meditations
-- Affirmations – Loving-Kindness
-- Safe, supported movement, at home or in a class (like gentle, therapeutic, chair or restorative yoga with an experienced teacher or yoga therapist), always with your doctor’s ok.
-- Deep relaxation
-- A practice of gratitude
-- Guided imagery and healing visualizations (CDs, online, apps)
GET SUPPORT

-- Recognize that the pain conditions exist (compassionate awareness; acceptance)
-- Get support/make changes – (social, professional, mind/body practices, groups, health coaching)
-- Strengthen and nourish your own foundation & boundaries through mind-body practices, journaling, creative pursuits

MIND-BODY PRACTICES

**Breath of Joy**
Gently & safely lengthen back, breathing in joy. Roll gently forward, exhaling negativity. Take a few deep breaths this way. If seated, slide hands from knees toward hips, drawing shoulders and elbows gently back, breathing in. Breathing out, slide hands back toward knees, rolling forward.

**Centering**
Choose a part of your daily routine – i.e., walking past a particular window -- and make it a caring ritual, a sacred space. Sink into a deep mindful breath saying, “I am worthy of this time.”

**Loving-Kindness**
The practice, which has many forms, can help decrease depression and anxiety and increase empathy. As you practice, compassionate awareness can clarify issues and allow your own wisdom to emerge, pointing to wise actions.

**Sample Phrases**
May I have peace
May I have ease in my body, mind, and heart
May I smile today

The full process suggests repeating phrases – choose your own heart-centered affirmations -- first aiming at yourself; then a “benefactor” in your life; a neutral person; a difficult person; a friend, and, finally, all beings.

**A GOOD MORNING: BED YOGA (Practice non-harming -- ahimsa)**
To bring the benefits of sleep into full consciousness, allow dreams to be remembered if possible. Allow an appreciation for the restoration, renewal and cleansing sleep has brought.

Take full breaths, making space for acceptance. Open your heart. Whatever dawning awareness brings – pain, stiffness, fear, worry, a sense of being rested, thoughts of the day – allow the breath to bring you compassion and acceptance.
Move toward gratitude -- for loved ones, for shelter, for beauty. The thoughts – choose three -- can be the same or change from day to day. Begin to move -- fingers, toes, wrists, ankles, arms and legs.

Squeeze. Stretch. Circle. Wiggle. All with the breath – it’s the wind that moves the leaves.

PILLOW TWIST -- Bend the knees, feet still on the bed, or comfortably supported by pillows or rolled-up towels or blankets, and gently move the knees from side to side. Rest the knees comfortably to one side, supporting your back, shoulder and legs and feet with pillows and blankets. Sink into the supported twist for several breaths. Extend arms out in a T formation. Gently turn your head away from the knees, and enjoy. Slowly return knees and nose to center. Repeat on the other side. The twists are about exploration, so notice your edges – what holds you in a twist – and perhaps bring breath awareness or gentle movement to those areas for more ease.

MOUNTAIN RISING – Support yourself to come to a comfortable seated position at the edge of the bed. Root down through your sitting bones, feeling heavy. Lift the toes and take a deep breath down to the feet. Release the toes. Align the feet, knees and hips, if possible. Breathe deeply into the pelvic bowl, expanding the belly, lower ribs and upper chest. Relax as you exhale, upper ribs gently coming in, lower ribs drawing inward, and belly to the spine. Shoulders over hips; ears over shoulders. Head floating – the top of the mountain. Inhale compassion into this aligned stillness, and exhale negativity, releasing tension as if a mountain waterfall was flowing from head to toe.

Take a few breaths here, feeling the power and majesty of a mountain. If possible, after those few breaths, come to stand, with support if necessary. Again, align feet, knees, hips, shoulders and ears as much as possible. Become the mountain again, being still and balanced, soaring into the sky from the solid earth foundation of your hips, legs and feet.

RISING WITH LOVING-KINDNESS
May I smile today. May I breathe deeply today. May I walk with ease today.
May you smile today. May you breathe deeply today. May you walk with ease today.
May all beings smile today. May all beings breathe deeply today.
May all beings walk with ease today.
DEEP RELAXATION – THE GOLD STANDARD OF RELAXATION

1. Move, then gently tense and release each part of the body, as long as it does not cause or aggravate pain, beginning with the feet and legs, going up through hips, torso, arms and including the face. As you tense, inhale; exhale as you release.

2. Vow to stay as still as possible and silently ask each part of the body to relax and let go – toes, feet, legs, fingers, arms, shoulders, spine, hips, abdomen, chest, throat and neck and all parts of the face. Observe the entire body completely relaxed for a minute.

3. Without changing the inhalation or exhalation, just watch the gentle wave of the breath in the body. Become a silent witness to the breath for about a minute.

4. Bring the focus to the mind and let all thoughts, sounds, feelings and distractions come and go like clouds passing. Honor the mind. Release the mind. Become a silent witness to the mind for about a minute.

5. Take a step back from the mind, the body and the breath. Go deeper into the sense of wholeness and peace. Allow that peace to fill you and surround each cell. Rest deeply here for a time (five minutes is the ideal minimum – and there is no limit on how long this can last) and enjoy it.

When you want to bring yourself out of Deep Relaxation, begin to gently deepen the breath. After a few deep breaths, letting go of anything that does not serve you as you exhale, begin to invite some movement back into the fingers and toes, arms and legs, then give yourself a big stretch. Move around a bit, keeping that sense of relaxation. Then slowly reenter your day or night, feeling gratitude for bringing yourself this peace.

For my online deep relaxation, google Nancy O’Brien and meditation and the video will pop up.