



Spiritual and emotional support for everyone –
*whoever you are, whatever you believe,
wherever you are.*

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I'm Living With Chronic Pain

You can connect with a counselor at [Chat with a Counselor](#).

Chronic pain is often invisible to others, but it can be overwhelming to anyone who lives with it. You are not alone.

The American Chronic Pain Association lists more than 100 types of chronic pain, from arthritis to IBS, from migraine to multiple sclerosis. Over 100 million people in the United States live with chronic pain.

Chronic pain is often invisible. Those who do not live with chronic pain cannot always look at someone and see that he or she suffers from migraines, rheumatoid arthritis, neuropathy, severe back pain, fibromyalgia, or other painful conditions.

Yet chronic pain can have huge psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social consequences for those who live with it. Unremitting pain can limit or even destroy one's ability to enjoy life. It may affect your ability to be a good spouse or parent, maintain friendships, perform well at work or even work at all. Living with chronic pain can change you and turn the world as you once knew it upside down.

While your experience – your pain, emotions, questions, and concerns are unique to you – you are not alone. Soul Care Project™ is here to be a support and resource for you.

With all the similarities that there are between chronic pain and other serious illnesses, there are differences.

- Some pain can be determined to be the result of a specific cause, for example, an old injury, an illness, an infection, or a condition such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, migraine headaches, or another condition. But some chronic pain seems to have no apparent cause. If you are dealing with an “unknown” for the reason of your pain, you may wrestle more with your emotions, spiritual questions, and ability to cope.
- Chronic pain has been shown to be linked to depression and anxiety. Pain can be linked to depression, and depression can be caused by pain; it's a difficult cycle to untangle. However, this does not mean that your pain “is all in your head.”
- Sometimes it takes a long time to find a treatment that will work. Chronic pain is difficult to treat and often takes a combination of medications, exercise, physical therapy, emotional support, complementary approaches, and spiritual care and resources.
- Despite the best of care, the reality is that sometimes chronic pain never goes away completely.

Soul Care Project™ is a place where you can find support in the midst of your pain, with resources for meeting the needs of your soul in ways that are practical, useful and encouraging.

You may find it helpful to read through the “Four Big Issues” that are found on this site: [Spiritual Questions](#), [Painful Feelings](#), [Grief and Loss](#), and [Planning Ahead](#). Each section has articles that may help in affirming that your feelings and questions are normal.

There may be times when you wonder about the meaning of your pain – or if it has any meaning at all – what will come next, and what your future holds. Beliefs and values that you have held dearly may be challenged as you try to find a sense of meaning or hope or comfort. If you haven't previously thought about what your beliefs and values are, the [Questions to Define Your Spirituality](#) and the [Checklist to Determine Your Level of Spiritual Distress](#) can be guides to help put words to describe your beliefs, values, and emotions. Use them to think through what is important to you; there are no “right” or “wrong” answers.

Then what?

First, complete the **Questions to Define Your Spirituality**. Once that is done, think about how those that bring you a sense of happiness, support, or relaxation can be more incorporated into your life. Below are some examples to help you.

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Finding Happiness, Support and Relaxation

Guided Imagery: Those that prefer to have time alone to recharge and find a sense of meaning in using meditation or prayer might find guided imagery helpful to cope with pain. The American Pain Association has a [free short five-minute video and guided imagery](#). You can find other guided imagery videos on YouTube such as the longer, [20-minute video for pain management by Rita Hickman](#). If you are someone who enjoys using an iPod, there are free podcasts available for download on iTunes, such as those from [Wellness Workbook](#).

Prayer and/or Meditation: If you have an active religious tradition or background in one, you are likely already familiar with prayers and/or meditation practices that you can engage in. Both can help to relax one's mind and, as a result, one's body and muscles. Focusing on the words or simply your breathing can be helpful in taking your focus off of your pain. You might want to explore the [Prayers and Mediations section of Soul Care Project](#) for prayers to start with. You can also talk with your religious leader if you have one, or a professional counselor through [Chat with a Counselor](#) for ideas and suggestions.

Music, the Arts, Nature: As with guided imagery, prayer, and meditation, if you find a sense of wellness or joy in music, nature, or the arts, spending time with these things may help to reduce your pain as you focus on or participate in them as you are able. While at first these may not seem like "spiritual practices", indeed they are if they bring you comfort, hope, and meaning as they soothe your soul.

Relationships: Being around those who fill our lives with joy and love can actually help to reduce pain. The challenge is finding a balance, both in how we relate to them and how we allow them to relate to us. Remember that a sense of spirituality is that which brings a sense of meaning, comfort, and joy to your life. When we allow others to care for us when we are feeling in pain or to join us in times of enjoyment, whether it is doing an activity or simply being together, then we are nurturing our spirituality. On the other hand, if we spend too much time with persons who make us feel guilty, sad, or bad about ourselves and our experience in living with pain, we are hurting our sense of worth. Find the persons who bring you joy, and spend less time with those who don't.

God/Our Higher Power/the Universe: Examine what your beliefs are about what is holy in your life and how you define God/your Higher Power/the force of the Universe – however you name that which is greater than us. If we can remember that God's (as an encompassing word) desire for us is to find wellness and meaning, that can help us cope with our pain. If our beliefs tell us that we are being punished by God/the Universe, then that is a belief that we need to explore to understand and perhaps change with the help of someone we trust.

That leads to the next step, the tool provided on [Soul Care Project as a Checklist to Determine Your Level of Spiritual Distress](#). The scale is designed to help you to examine what strengths you have as well as potential areas of challenge. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. It will simply help you in identifying areas in which you may want to seek further resources or support.

Spiritual struggle is defined as having high spiritual needs and low spiritual resources with which to address those needs. It can lead to what professional counselors call "spiritual distress" when a person is struggling with such issues as the meaning of life, death, or their belief system, feeling angry towards God/a Higher Power/the Universe, questions about pain and suffering, or feeling as though one is being punished by or abandoned in the midst of their illness or pain. Distress may come from not being able to participate in spiritual or religious activities that have been important to you. You may not feel comfortable with the changes that your chronic pain has brought to your life.

If you are experiencing spiritual distress remember that it can be an absolutely normal feeling for someone who is living with chronic pain. However, if you find that by completing the checklist and thinking about these issues that you are

feeling such distress at a high level, it is important that you find support and resources that will help you to manage and reduce your distress. This is because, as medical professionals have learned, chronic pain is an experience not just of your body but also your mind and soul: the three work together and by focusing on all three areas you will be able to find the best ways to manage your pain.

If you have a spiritual or religious leader, he or she might be the person you feel most comfortable with in discussing these feelings. If you do not have one, or you don't feel at ease in talking to them about your questions, feelings, and concerns help is available through [Chat With a Counselor](#).

[Chat with a Counselor](#)

Offers someone in spiritual distress or pain the opportunity to connect with a professional counselor who will listen and offer care, comfort and support. Help is given without judgment and regardless of your belief system or lack of one. You can find how to contact Chat with a Counselor [here](#).

Chronic pain can be overwhelming to live with, especially when you don't know how you may feel from one minute or hour or day to the next. Yet by attending to your soul, you can find ways to help you cope and find comfort.

[Resources for Medical Information about Chronic Pain](#)

Soul Care Project is not a site that provides medical information. There are many excellent sites that do provide medical information and advice about living with chronic pain. Two are:

- [The Pain Action Alliance to Implement a National Strategy](#) (PAINS) is an alliance of leaders working in professional societies, patient advocacy organizations, policy groups, people with pain, payers, and the private sector working together toward a common vision and mission. On their website you will find a section on Understand Pain that provides numerous resources including Pain 101, Kinds of Pain, and Your Right to Pain Management, Treatment Options, and a Glossary of Terms.
- [The American Chronic Pain Association](#)[The American Chronic Pain Association](#), as part of their mission, facilitates peer support and education for individuals with chronic pain and their families so that these individuals may live more fully in spite of their pain. There you will find Conditions A to Z information, Medications and Treatments, and Pain Management Tools.

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<http://soulcareproject.org/help-guides/chronic-pain.html>