

# Lakeview Beacon

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## EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL PAIN THE CONNECTION

by JANET HUGHES, LMSW, ACSW

Emotions can lead to physical pathology and pain when they are experienced in an unhealthy fashion. Our emotions are connected to sensory centers in our brain so what we feel emotionally can determine what we experience physically. This is no surprise to anyone who has suffered a broken heart and knows how you can feel the pain right in your chest. Ongoing emotional pain can lead to changes in the brain. Prolonged sadness can leave us drained or sore and achey. Anxiety and anger can release adrenaline which results in feeling jumpy or uneasy, or short of breath even dizzy. Shame and guilt can often be felt in the stomach leading to nausea or even stomach disorders.

Everyone feels emotions, good and bad. Most of the time we can move through these emotions and resolve them to a degree they no longer affect us. Feeling an emotion and letting it go is normal and natural. Getting stuck on a particular emotion is what can start to cause us problems. Emotional pain can become crippling when it affects your personal life, work life, mood and causes physical pain. Sometimes people feed the emotion by continuing to think about it and not forgiving past grievances. They hold onto the feeling as long as possible, they ruminate of how they were wronged and think the thoughts that cause them hurt or anger. Instead of addressing the issue and letting go or resolving it so it does not affect them as much they increase their discomfort by replaying and reliving the painful event. Or they may have intrusive thought from a traumatic event that are making them relive the experience. Sometimes people try and ignore painful events and stuff them but they don't seem to go away. It can be a silent, smoldering anger, disappointment, fear, guilt, or hurt. It may be caused by neglect, betrayal, loss, divorce, physical or sexual abuse or trauma, disappointment, abandonment, or grief.

Breaking the pattern between physical pain, and emotional pain is the pathway to healing. What are you going to focus on? Shift off of focusing on anger or things out of your control and instead shift onto what will promote relaxation, and healing. If you are plagued by a past event seek counseling to help resolve the emotions around it. Mindfulness is a relaxation tool where we recognize we can control our thoughts and choose what to focus on. At any moment in time we can choose where to focus our attention.

**“Pain and negative pathological emotions can feed off each other in an unending cycle.”**

**“Individuals most susceptible to experiencing chronic pain often have a history of physical and emotional traumas.”**

[www.phydosclinic.com](http://www.phydosclinic.com)

**Depressed patients have three times the risk of developing chronic pain.**

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**“The overlap between emotion and pain is not a roadblock...but can provide a pathway to gain control over one's pain.”**

**Shawn Radcliffe in healthline.com**

## PHYSICAL PAIN CAN CAUSE EMOTIONAL PAIN

Studies have shown that short term pain is processed in our sensory brain area, whereas, ongoing long term pain starts activating the frontal brain where emotions are processed. So when we endure physical pain for a long time our perception moves from sensory areas of the brain to emotional processing. Therefore, even when the pain producing stimuli is removed in these studies, the person finds themselves still experiencing the pain in this area of their brain.

Physical pain can also affect our emotions. Waking up with debilitating aches leads to feeling stressed, frustrated, angry, resentful, or even fearful. People with chronic pain are more likely to experience depression or anxiety.

People who experience chronic pain often begin to neglect healthy life choices due to the pain. Because it hurts to move it is easy to not want to exercise or make a healthy meal. Sleep can be affected due to pain so it is not uncommon for chronic pain patients to increase their use of alcohol or caffeine. This pattern can start a vicious cycle by preventing the body from healing.

When someone is not feeling good it is also hard to socialize. It is easy to blow off joining friends when you're not feeling well. Socialization and exercise are powerful forces in combatting depression.

Knowing this is not to take on self blame that you are not doing this, but more to empower people to understand how to break out of the cycle. Trying to focus on your emotions can improve your pain. Finding a way to be positive and hopeful is a powerful tool.

## WHAT TO DO

Breaking the cycle between physical pain, emotions and stress is necessary. Here are some suggestions:

1. If you are unable to exercise, find a way to stretch or move your arms or legs in a pool.
2. Look up a healthy easy recipe that does not take much time to make. Or make one big batch of a healthy soup for the week.
3. Get more knowledge. Get evaluated by a pain physician or psychologist. Ask about trying biofeedback, acupuncture, or yoga.
4. Read books and watch movies that inspire hope and optimism. Envision your future with less pain.  
**HELPING OTHER PEOPLE CAN BE EXTREMELY POWERFUL IN ALTERING OUR EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS.**
5. Talk with your doctor about getting better sleep.
6. Make a plan for stress management. Relaxation techniques can include meditation, being outside, finding a hobby.
7. Meditation is easy using YouTube videos, internet, or apps on your phone. Just look up meditation. You're trying to change the pathways and interrupt the pain/emotion pathway. Be repetitive with your meditation. Practice "Mindfulness" meditation.
8. Focus on being positive and optimistic. Meditate on what you're grateful for and excited to do in the future.
9. Be social even if it is over the phone or in small increments of time face to face. Don't isolate.
10. Get a gentle massage.

# FOOD AND MOOD

**Carol Murray, LMSW**

All of us are aware that what we eat has a direct connection to our physical health. Not as many are aware that what we eat also affects our mental health. Our brain, the center for emotional and cognitive functioning, needs nutrients just like the rest of our body. Studies that compared the typical American diet to the Mediterranean diet or traditional Japanese diet, found the risk of depression to be 25-35% lower with the healthier food plans.

Our gut, often referred to as the “second brain”, is the center for food processing, and the health of our gut also impacts mood. It is important to have good bacteria and lots of water to keep the system working smoothly.

To test out how foods you eat affect your mood, try keeping a food diary for 1-2 weeks. Note how you feel, both physically and emotionally each day. To take the test further, try eating a “clean” diet for 2-3 weeks and compare your notes. You can slowly introduce other foods back into your diet while continuing to monitor how you feel. Processed foods, caffeine, alcohol and refined sugar are the worst offenders. They can heighten depression and trigger anxiety. Make sure your food plan includes antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, fiber, protein and the ability to maintain healthy bacteria.

So, what should you eat to enhance your mood and keep the system working smoothly? The list includes: nuts, fish, grass fed beef, chicken/turkey, bananas, whole grains/oats, lentils, fresh fruit and vegetables, fermented foods, spinach...and of course, water...and last but not least...dark chocolate (in small amounts).

*Resolving emotional blocks, addressing poor dietary issues, improving sleep and lifestyle habits as well as socializing and helping others helps heal chronic pain.*

Here are some resources to get you started:

1. Get a notebook and a pen and start your food diary.
2. Check out these websites: [sproutedkitchen.com](http://sproutedkitchen.com) and [eatingwell.com](http://eatingwell.com)
3. Books that are helpful: [Fast Food Nation](#), [Fat Chance](#), [Mindful Eating](#)  
for children try : [The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food](#).
4. Consult with a registered dietician.

# **Lakeview Counseling**

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## **Resources**

1. [Ashley Boynes-Shuck - check out her blogs.](#)
2. [Less Pain, Fewer Pills](#) by Dr. Beth Darnall
1. [Back in Control](#) by Dr. Hanscom
2. CALM app (relaxation)
3. Pain Relief Hypnosis-My Chronic Pain Killer app
4. Yoga for Pain Relief (purchased app)
5. GPS for the Soul (app)
6. [HEADSPACE](#) (app- teaches meditation)

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