

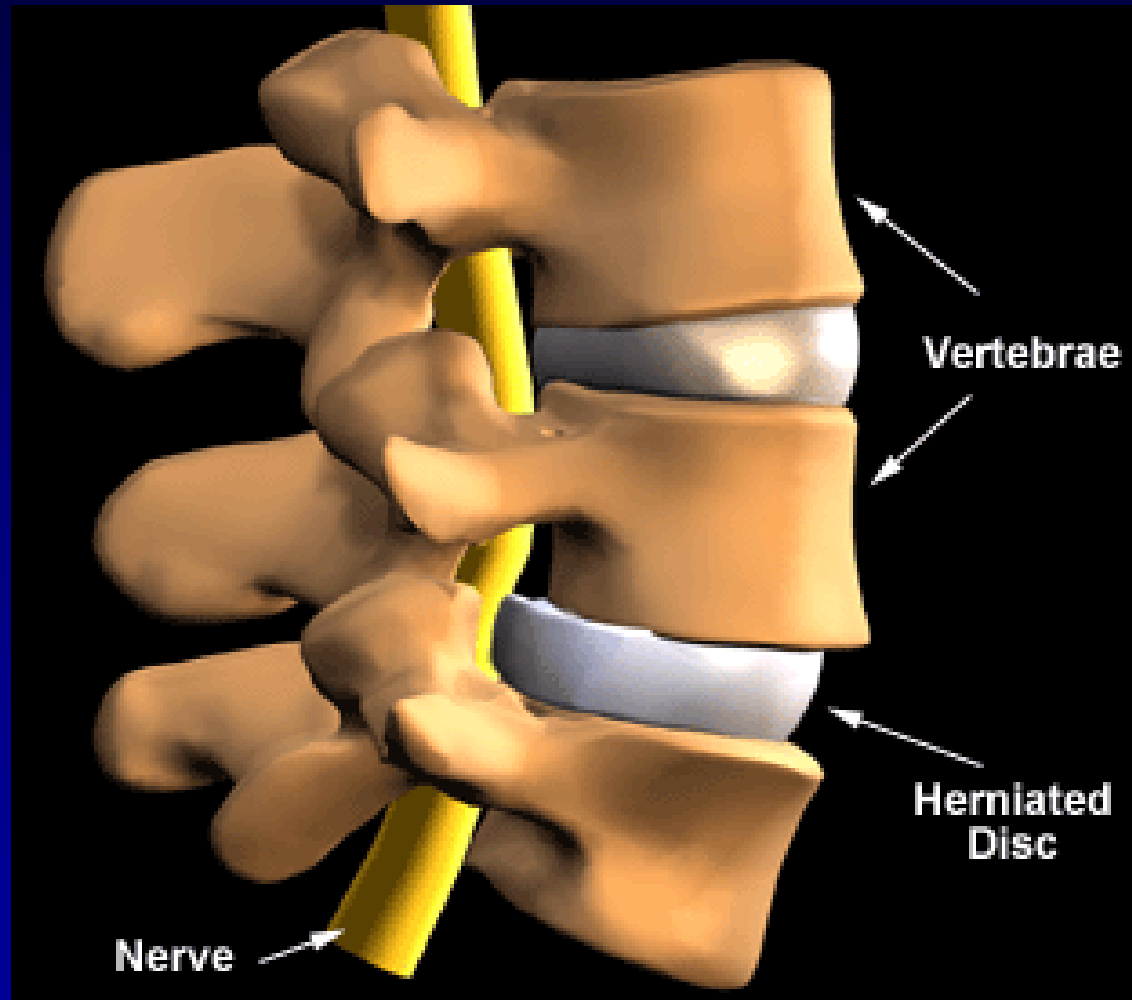
Beyond Symptom Management: Mindfulness and Rehabilitation Practices for Chronic Pain

Dr. Ronald D. Siegel

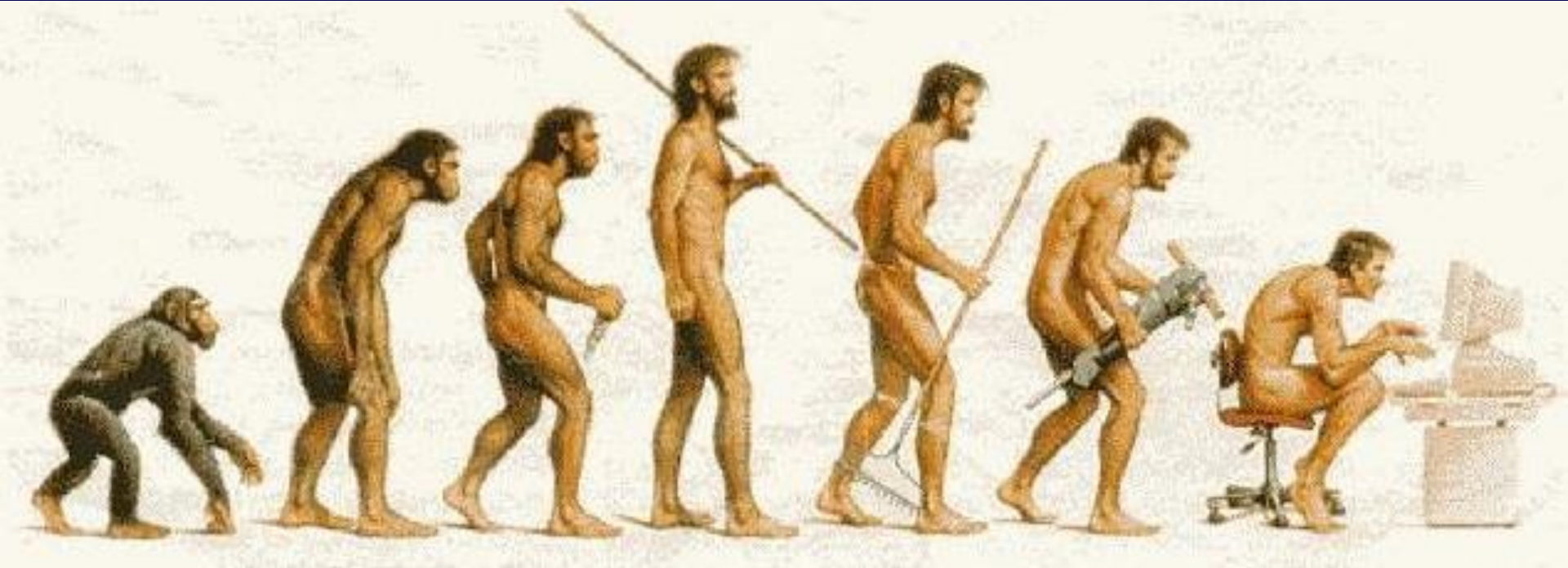
Center for Mindfulness and Compassion
Cambridge Health Alliance
Harvard Medical School

Chronic Back Pain

Bad Back?



The Orthopedic Story



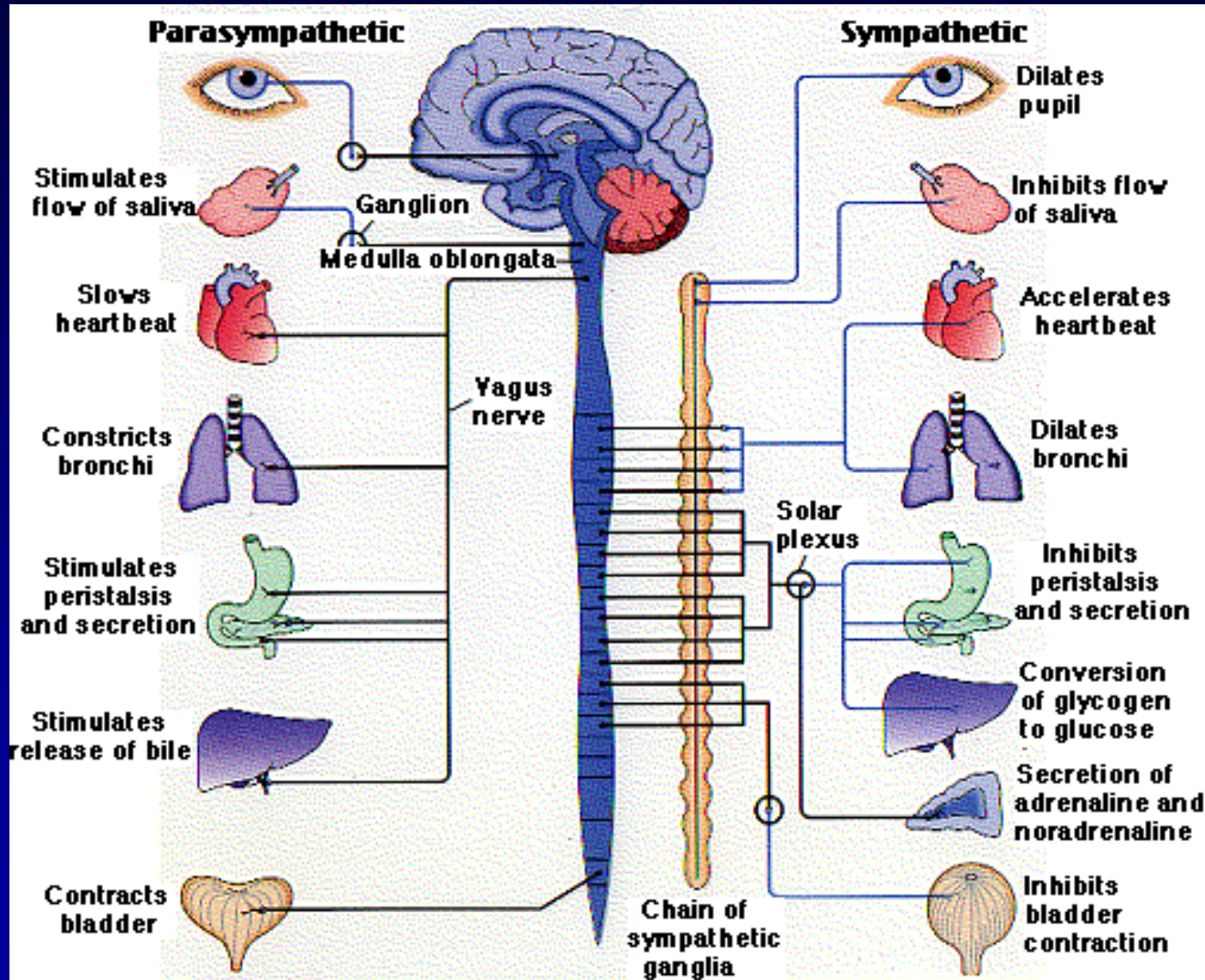
What's the Evidence?

- 2/3 of people who have never suffered from serious back pain have the same sorts of “abnormal” back structures that are often blamed for the pain
- Millions of people who suffer from chronic back pain show no “abnormalities” in their backs
- Many people continue to have pain after “successful” surgical repair

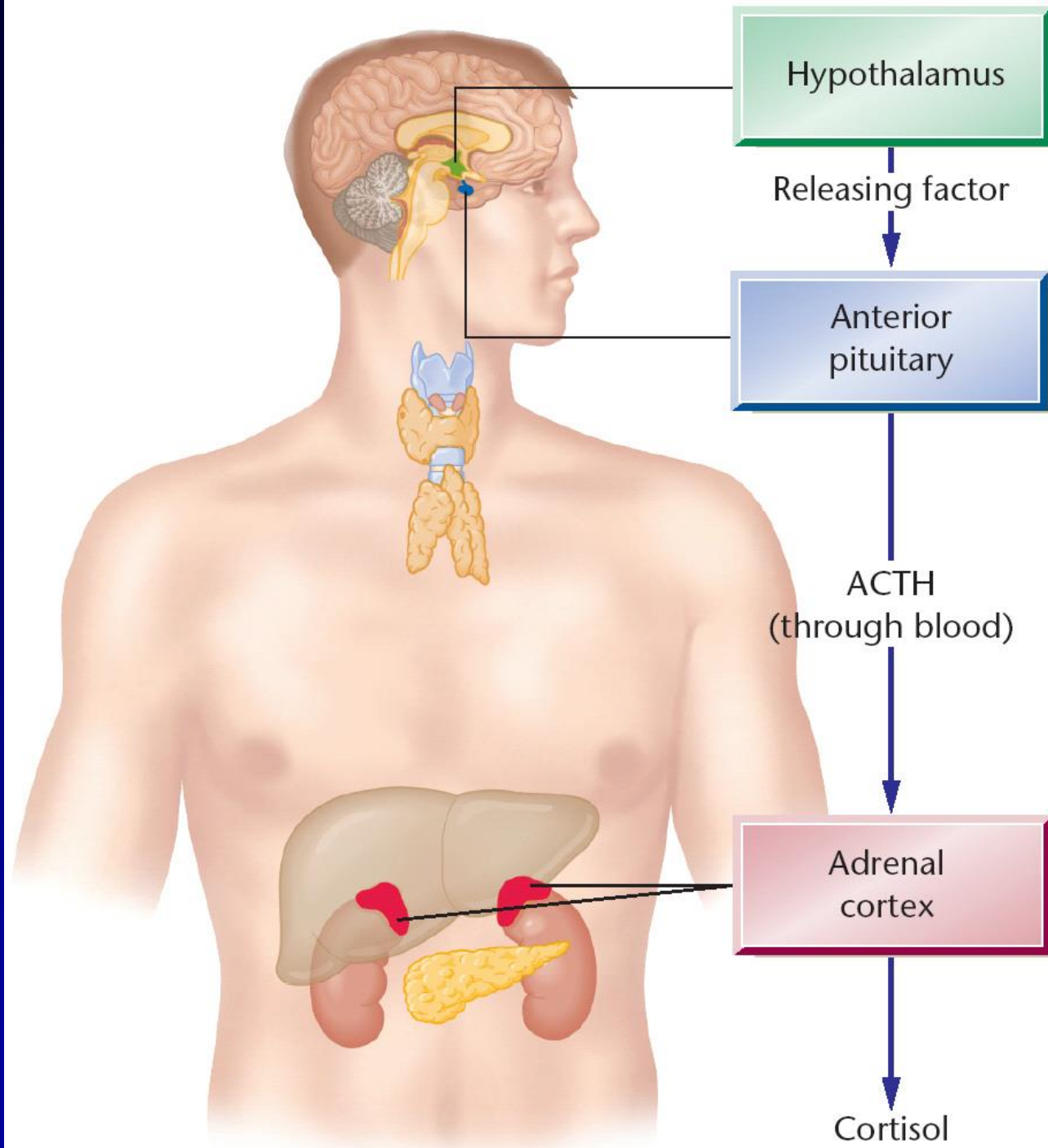
“Smoking Gun” Studies

- What countries have chronic back pain epidemics?
- Who gets chronic back pain?
- What is the quickest way out of acute back pain?

Autonomic Nervous System



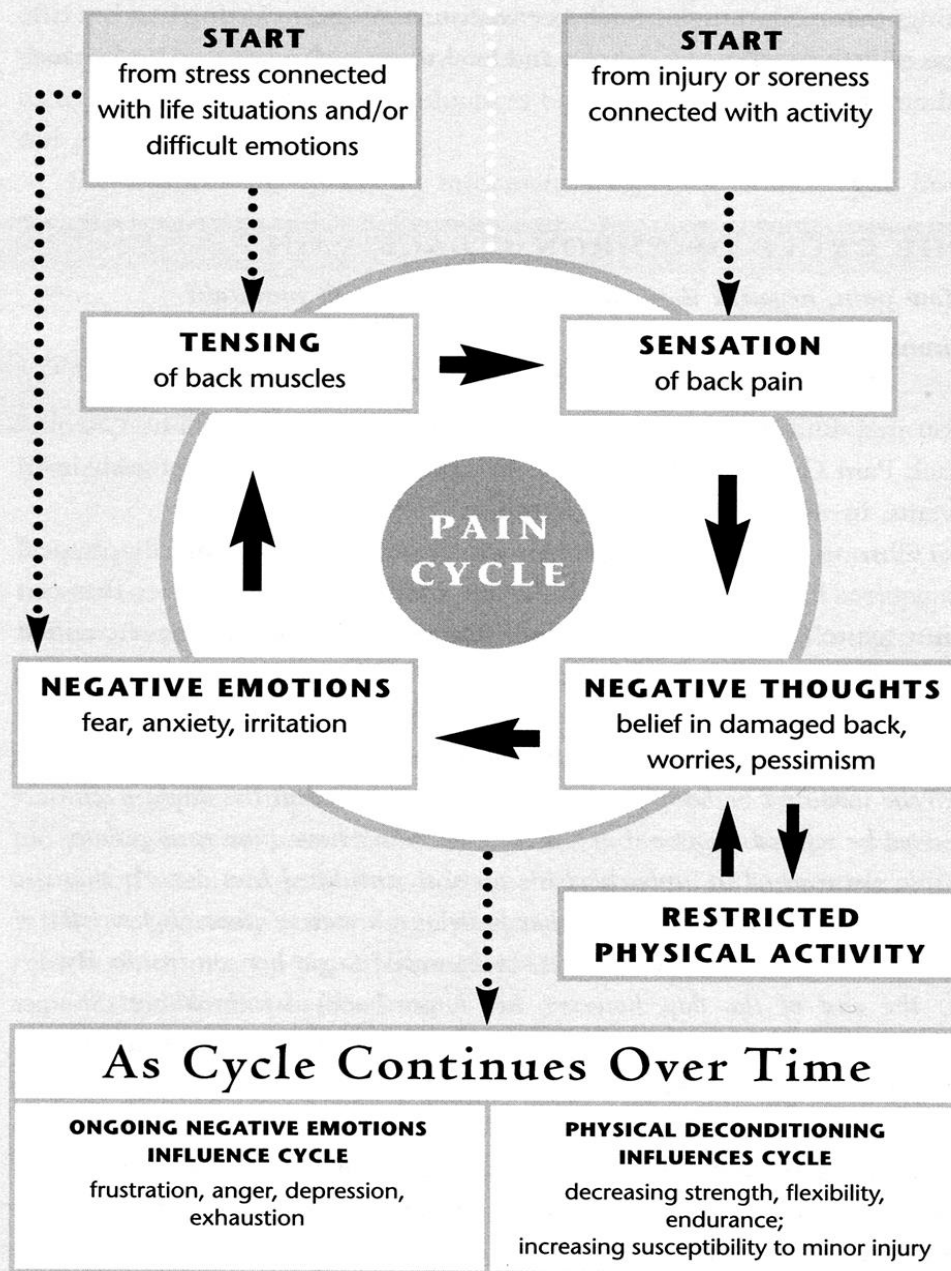
HPA Axis



A Well-Adjusted Brain



THE CHRONIC BACK PAIN CYCLE



Not Imaginary Pain

- While psychological stressors of all types can contribute to chronic back pain, **the pain is *not* imagined or “All in the head”**
- Caused by real muscle tension
- Patients need to hear this *repeatedly*

Mindfulness for Rehabilitation

1. Medical Evaluation
2. Cognitive Restructuring
3. Resuming Normal Activity
4. Working with Negative Emotions

The Story of the Two Arrows



When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows (*Sallatha Sutta* [The Arrow]).

$$(\text{Pain}) \times (\text{Resistance}) = \text{Suffering}$$

- Pain can be observed to be separate from “suffering”
- Apparently solid pain states are observed to be like frames in a movie, ever-changing

Pain is Inevitable, Suffering is Optional

- Suffering Includes:
 - Grimacing, wincing, bracing.
 - Aversive thoughts.
 - Wishes for relief.
 - Self-punitive thoughts.
 - Anger, fear, depression regarding condition.

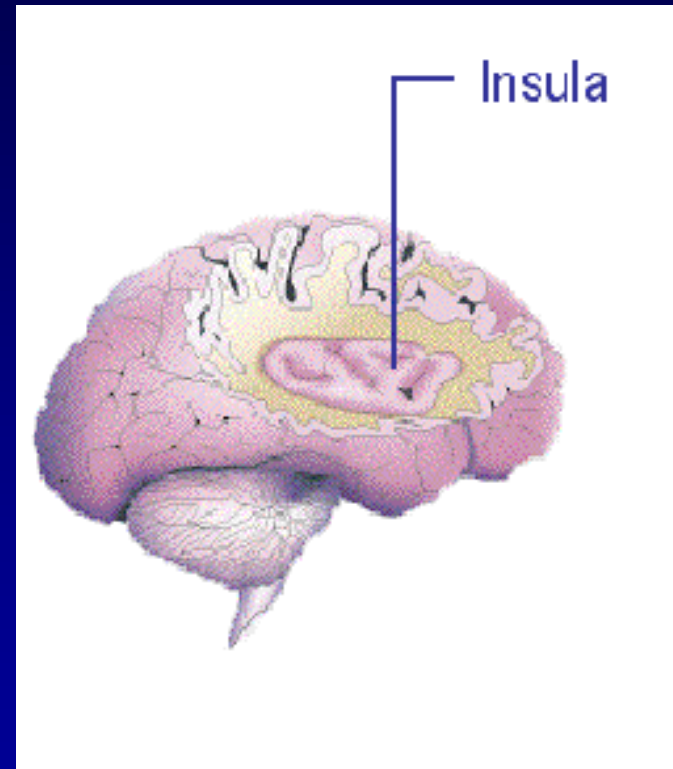
Mindfulness for Experimentally Induced Pain

- Compared to novices, Experienced Meditators:
 - find pain less unpleasant
 - can observe pain less reactively
 - find that open monitoring reduces pain unpleasantness
 - have less anticipatory pain anxiety



Insula

- Associated with interoception
 - Visceral and “gut” feelings
 - Processes transient body sensations
- Activated during meditation practice



Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)

- Evaluates emotional responses and regulates emotion
 - “Yes, looks like a lion, but lions aren’t found here, so it’s probably a beige rock”

Neurobiology of Mindfulness and Pain

- Meditators practicing mindfulness when exposed to pain:
 - had decreased activity in the lateral prefrontal cortex (IPFC) – evaluates sensation
 - had increased activation in the posterior insula – registers sensation

Mindfulness & Cognitive Restructuring

Seeing Thoughts as Thoughts

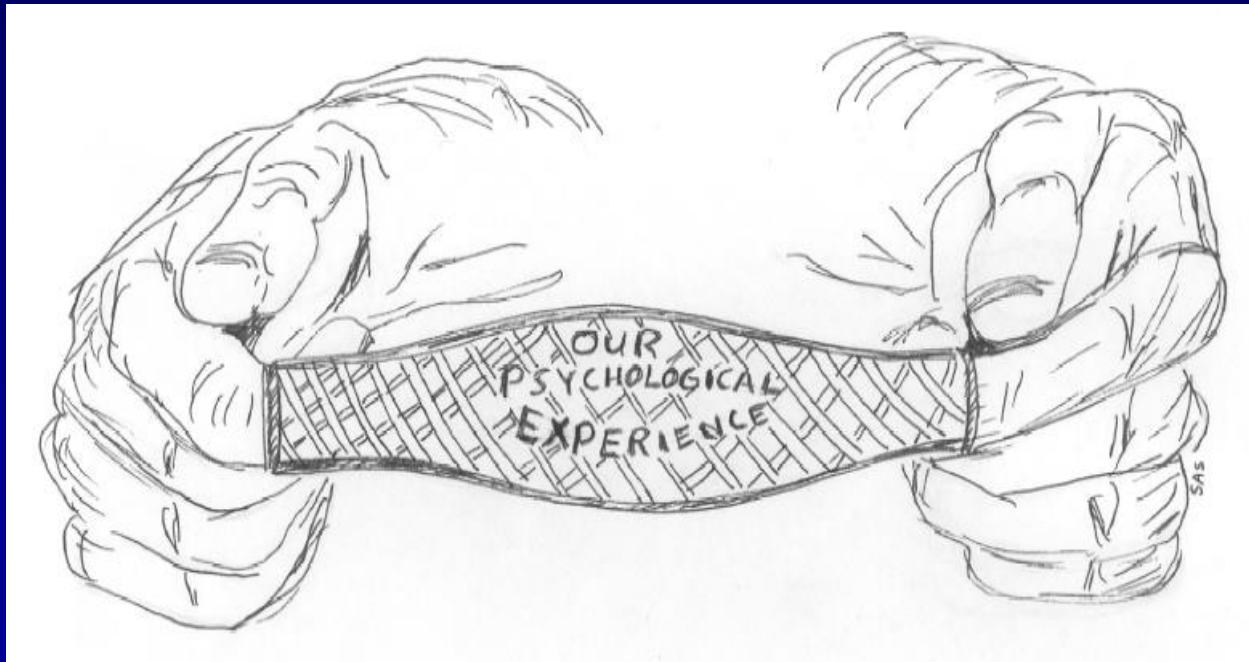
- Mindfulness increases cognitive flexibility
- Seeing role of beliefs in the problem
- Not pain sensations themselves, but our reactions that determine suffering

Enhancing Metacognitive Awareness

- Notice prevalence of anxious thought and feeling
- Notice future-oriented catastrophizing
- Notice “budgeting” activity

Mindfulness & Resuming Normal Life

Attachment to Symptom Reduction Perpetuates Disorders



Resuming Lost Activities

- Exposure and response prevention central to treating *kinesiophobia*
- Resume activities often enough to be convinced that they are not damaging



Increasing Symptom Tolerance

- Pain as object of awareness
- Bring attention to wider area if necessary



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Mindfulness & Working with Negative Emotions

Opening to Painful Emotions

- Not “my,” but “the”
 - Sadness
 - Fear
 - Anger



Other Pain Disorders

Same 4 Steps

1. Medical Evaluation
2. Cognitive Restructuring
3. Resuming Normal Activity
4. Working with Negative Emotions



Other Muscle Tension Disorders

- Dynamics very similar to chronic back pain
 - Headaches; TMJ; neck, knee, foot, wrist, shoulder pain
- Need to rule out treatable causes
 - Then follow same steps

Hyperacusis

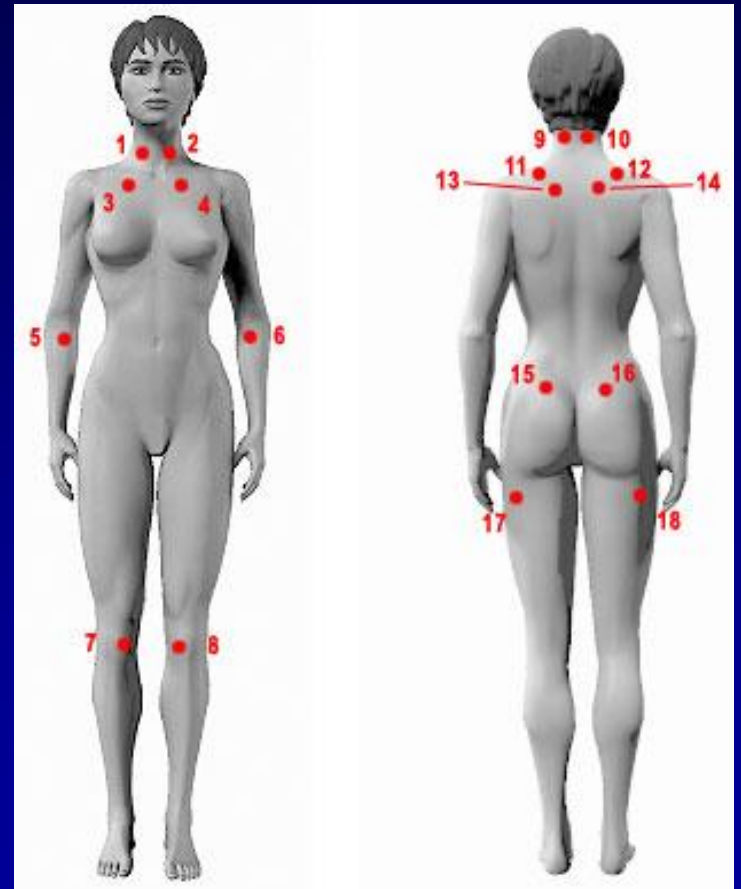
- Fear of discomfort amplifies sound
- Avoidance hypersensitizes hearing
- Mindful acceptance resolves disorder



Fibromyalgia

“...we are creating an illness rather than curing one.”

-- Dr. Frederick Wolfe



It's
Probably
Nothing



It's
Probably
Something
Serious



New Age Guilt



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