

## 04

**TIP: ACCEPT IT OFF**

Consider this: chronic low back pain and its uninvited guest, sciatica, have made an appearance in the lives of approximately 80% of people at some point (Hoy et al., 2010). While the physical discomfort is undeniable, these conditions often exert a broader influence, potentially leading to a decrease in beloved activities, disrupted sleep, reduced work productivity, and a general dampening of spirits.

Navigating the Emotional Roller Coaster of Chronic Pain:

Dealing with chronic pain can often be likened to riding a roller coaster, with its ups, downs, and unexpected twists.

**This journey might feature distinct stages:**

-> Denial: This is the initial climb up the roller coaster, where the reality of the persistent pain is as hard to accept as a sudden stop at the peak.

-> Anger: The first rapid descent, filled with frustration and the echoed question, "Why me?"

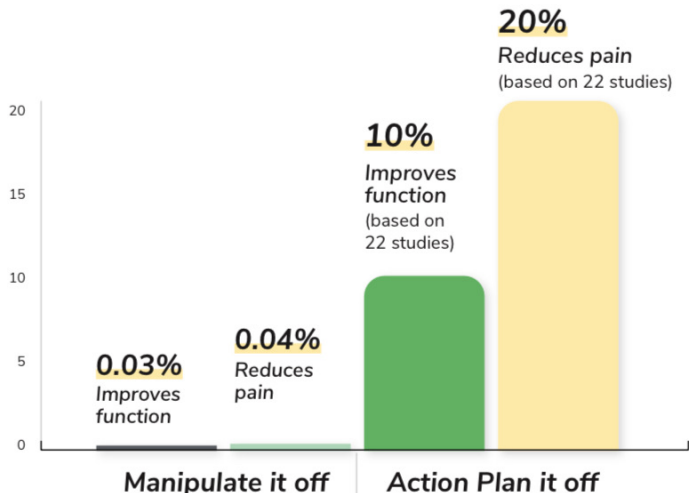
-> Bargaining: This part resembles the twisty turns of the ride, where one starts making promises hoping for a swift recovery, much like hoping the ride ends soon.

-> Depression: A slower, sinking portion of the ride, where interest in favorite activities fades, akin to the lull before the next big plunge.

-> Acceptance: The final glide into the station, where the reality sinks in that while pain has a seat on your life's roller coaster, it doesn't necessarily control the ride.

20-50% - is statistically significant, and labelled as making a small difference

0-20% - Makes no real difference (taking placebo into account)



Admittedly, traversing these stages is not a walk in the park. Accepting a new temporary “normal”, much like accepting that the roller coaster ride has its highs and lows, becomes an essential part of life.

#### Guiding Through the Roller Coaster: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

In the roller coaster of pain, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) can serve as a helpful map. ACT recognizes disability as a part of the human journey, leading to an array of internal experiences. Rather than attempting to ignore or control these experiences, ACT promotes accepting them and maintaining a focus on engaging in meaningful life activities (Motallebimoghadam et al., 2019).

An opportunity to emotionally process the grief of the loss, which is a bit like acknowledging the scary parts of the roller coaster ride.

A chance to understand the underlying beliefs that trigger emotional reactions, much like understanding why certain parts of the ride are more frightening than others.

Recent research has indicated that ACT is particularly effective in managing chronic pain, even outperforming Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in some studies (Lai, 2023). Impressively, ACT has also demonstrated effectiveness in online formats (Trindade, 2021), much like a virtual roller coaster ride.

#### Embracing the Roller Coaster Ride with Chronic Pain

Living with chronic pain can indeed feel like being on a relentless roller coaster. But remember, you're not on this ride alone. With the right

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strategies, like the safety bars on the roller coaster, you can manage your journey despite the twists and turns. And who knows?

With time, you might even find ways to appreciate the ride.

In conclusion, while chronic pain may persist as an unwelcome guest, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy provides a path toward embracing life's roller coaster.

By learning to (hopefully temporarily) coexist with pain rather than fighting it, one can shift focus from what's lost to what remains: the opportunity to lead a purposeful, value-driven life.

## Footnotes

Hoy D, March L, Brooks P, et al. The global burden of low back pain: estimates from the Global Burden of Disease 2010 study. *Ann Rheum Dis*. 2014;73(6):968-974. doi:10.1136/annrheumdis-2013-204

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