



The Grinberg Method®

# Transforming Pain

*We all experience pain; it belongs to life. And yet, whether it appears in brief moments or for longer periods, is ours or that of others, we usually find it difficult to handle.*

*This booklet describes an approach that allows the use of one's will and attention to transform the experience of pain and reduce the suffering that is so often associated with it.*

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***Disclaimer:***

The Grinberg Method is a methodology of attention that teaches through expanding and focusing body attention. It does not claim to heal, to be an alternative medicine, a massage therapy, or to be considered among the helping professions. It is not intended for persons suffering from conditions considered life threatening. Nor for those with conditions or serious illnesses that require medical or psychiatric attention. Moreover, it is not intended to be a substitute for any kind of treatment. The method has no ideological or mystical basis and does not demand any particular lifestyle.

## **Introduction**

Pain is one of the most powerful forces to act on us; it is integral to our daily existence, a part of what it is to be human. It may be the greatest struggle that we face in life and is very often a significant factor in defining our behavior and experience. But it is also a power that increases our awareness, being an essential motivator in how we learn, evolve, adapt, create, find new solutions to difficulties and problems or learn from mistakes. It adds to our humanity, giving depth, humility and a sense of mortality; life becomes precious, because pain reminds us that it can, and will, be lost.

The Grinberg Method approaches pain as an experience that happens within the scope of our attention. It calls for urgency indicating that the body requires attention, a change or has a need, and is thus necessary for survival and existence. Pain acts as a border that we should not exceed, showing us the limits beyond which we would die or injure ourselves. Being a part of the body's effort to heal itself, it is a necessary and natural experience of the body.

Pain can be the result of an injury, appear as a constantly aching back, recurring headaches, hurting knees and the like, and can also be experienced as the pain of failure, loss or separation. When pain is short-lived and passes quickly, we experience it but do not suffer. However, if pain is recurring, persistent and never-ending, it causes suffering. It then deeply affects our lives in terms of well-being, from our ability to rest and relax, to our capacity to work, enjoy recreational activities, maintain and develop relationships with people around us and more.

It is of no wonder that culturally, pain is mostly regarded as an enemy, and we are generally unwilling to experience it. Although each of us will have our own particular style, the act will always be to direct attention away from pain; becoming busy with something else, reducing our breathing and contracting our muscles in an attempt not to feel the pain. We force our body into set postures, responses and attitudes, and shape our attention to exclude it from our experience. Mostly, we are unaware that this is what we are doing, as it is so automatic and habitual, sometimes for many years, and we do not know that there is the possibility of choosing to react differently.

The Grinberg Method practices a methodology of attention; it correlates the suffering that results from long-term pain with the static way in which we relate to it and the efforts we invest in trying to avoid it. Thus, it teaches people to increase and focus their attention on their bodies – develop their body attention - and as a result, gain control over the automatic way of reacting to pain through and with their body. Although often we are not responsible for the causes of our pain, and cannot be blamed for the situation, we can be responsible for the way we respond to the existence of pain in our lives. Instead of a repetitive response, which entrenches the experience, the Grinberg Method suggests that through a change of attitude, and by applying our will and attention, we can transform the experience of pain. The methodology does not seek to heal, fix or erase pain, but aims to reduce the suffering caused by it, which can many times lead to the disappearance of pain, as the body can then heal itself.

This booklet seeks to share the view of the Grinberg Method about the way we can learn to transform pain using our attention. The methodology is applied in one-on-one processes, workshops and group activities.

## **The impact of chronic pain**

Pain is a very common phenomenon in the human experience and one that touches the lives of us all. Not only does it affect those who suffer, it also influences their friends, family and colleagues, ultimately reducing well-being for all.

The following are a few statistics <sup>(\*)</sup> to highlight the dramatic effect of long-term pain on individuals and cultures, it being one of the most draining issues for humans today. According to these statistics, one in five of us suffer from pain, and thus we need to accept that pain is unavoidable; if it is not you then it is someone next to you, and if it is not today then it could be tomorrow.

*Chronic pain is a devastating and widespread problem, striking one in five adults across Europe; people with chronic pain suffer on average for 7 years; one in five for 20 years or more; across Europe chronic pain accounts for nearly 500 million lost working days every year - costing the European economy at least €34 billion; over 40% of chronic pain sufferers say their pain impacts on everyday activities, from lifting and carrying to taking exercise and sleeping.*

*Pain in Europe* [www.britishpainsociety.org/Pain%20in%20Europ%20survey%20report.pdf](http://www.britishpainsociety.org/Pain%20in%20Europ%20survey%20report.pdf)

*Pain is a major health care problem in the world today with one in five people suffering from moderate to severe chronic pain.*

*World Health Organization* <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2004/pr70/en/>

*Low back pain is one of the most significant health problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 70 percent to 85 percent of all people have back pain at some time in their life. Back pain is the most frequent cause of activity limitation in people younger than 45 years old.*

*Yale Medical Group* <http://www.yalemedicalgroup.org/stw/Page.asp?PageID=STW023967>

*More than one-quarter of Americans (26%) age 20 years and over – or, an estimated 76.5 million Americans – reported that they have had a problem with pain of any sort that persisted for more than 24 hours in duration. This number does not account for acute pain.*

*American Pain Foundation* [www.painfoundation.org/learn/publications/files/PainFactsandStats.pdf](http://www.painfoundation.org/learn/publications/files/PainFactsandStats.pdf)

*The annual cost of chronic pain in the United States, including healthcare expenses, lost income, and lost productivity, is estimated to be \$100 billion.*

*The American Academy of Pain Medicine* <http://www.painmed.org/patient/facts.html>

<sup>(\*)</sup> All links mentioned were accessed 16.05.11

## **Common attitudes towards pain**

Personal reactions and attitudes towards pain are learned and, although individual, are usually very similar in essence. Generally speaking, pain is seen as a terrifying enemy, we do not want it and our main aim is to escape from it or get rid of it. Through distancing ourselves from the experience and excluding it from our being, our attention and will are invested to reduce the intensity of pain and lessen its impact. We create a relationship with pain as if it were not part of us, similarly to when we hear a disturbing noise or feel something that bothers us that we cannot stop or escape.

Our way of responding to pain is automatic, to the point that we do not even notice we are doing it. We slip into the same general state of being each time we experience pain, without control, attention or awareness; it “just happens”. As usually this way of responding is so well practiced, it appears as “us” or as part of who we are. Normally we are convinced that it is the best or only way to deal with pain.

Many of the ways in which we react to pain were learned at a young age. We acquire knowledge, attitudes and behavior from the people around us and adopt cultural tendencies and fashions to cope with pain. As children, we often hear instructions and messages not to feel it, such as “it’s not so bad, stop making such a fuss” or “real men don’t have pain”. So a child who watches his father tense up and become angry when his back aches will imitate and learn to deal with his own pain in the same way. And it may be the opposite – a “big drama” whenever pain occurs, no matter how small and passing it may be. Children who suffer an injury or trauma involving intense pain will learn quickly not to feel it. They are using the body’s healthy ability to disconnect and avoid an experience when an intense trauma involving insufferable pain happens. However, to do so regardless of the pain’s intensity, might create a situation in which all pain is perceived as traumatic and too much to deal with, leaving us surprised and shaken each time. Because of what we learned in the past, we usually dread the experience of pain and often start to react before there is any sensation of it at all.

Part of our learned behavior is to find reasons and explanations for the pain, which makes us very busy in our minds, separating us from what pain is trying to show us in the body. As we see it as a problem, we put our attention on trying to understand and solve it. If we do talk about our pain to others, we complain, judge and have opinions about it. We create divisions between physical, emotional and mental pain, rating them as better or worse, more or less important, and all in all create a parallel experience that is part of our reaction to pain. Even our language grew to reflect such attitudes to pain; we refer to “my back pain” or say that “it” has come back again; talking about pain as an entity with its own free will that comes to visit when it wants.

Pain is often seen as an affliction for which there is little individual control or for which relief is in the hands of someone else. It is frequently perceived as punishment for something we did or did not do, and so we add guilt and shame, or anger and hate, and intensify the suffering.

People will respond to pain by trying to overcome it, investing efforts in refusing its effects. Others may see it as shameful and try to hide that they are in pain. Some will attempt to ignore it and pretend it does not exist, while others will be paralyzed by it, becoming helpless and unable to function.

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A lot of the effort to lessen the impact and reduce the intensity of pain is done by creating barriers in the form of muscular tension and contraction in the body, which all serve to pull attention away from the place of pain. The physical efforts we make drain and tire us, and we are unable to rest and relax. Many of us become rigid, tense, reducing our freedom of movement, and in doing so, add more pain to the original, creating a vicious cycle in which our responses to pain make it worse.

When so much of who we are is focused on this struggle, it separates and isolates us from our surroundings, living a nightmare in which we experience being inadequate or humiliated, and with the frustration of it being never-ending. Although we may think we are alone in our suffering, pain is not personal; in addition to many other effects, to be next to someone in pain creates a sense of sadness from being so helpless and unable to do or change anything.

And finally, by constantly seeking to reduce the intensity of pain, we, unavoidably, do the same with the intensity of life, draining it of color, excitement or pleasure, finding ourselves in an endless battle full of suffering.

## **Transforming pain**

The Grinberg Method points out the difference between two possibilities of dealing with the experience of pain. One, in which we invest a lot of energy and effort to avoid, resist and erase it, and another in which we invest our attention in experiencing and agreeing to the pain. While the first prolongs the pain, enlarges its scope, drains the person of energy and intensifies suffering, agreeing to experience pain allows the body to deal with what is. The pain can then be transformed and the body uses this energy to recuperate, recover and heal itself. Even if the recovery is not complete, a great amount of suffering is reduced, because energy and effort are no longer invested in reacting and pushing against the pain.

As a methodology that teaches attention, the Grinberg Method does not focus on the causes, reasons and explanations related to pain. Instead, it focuses on the way we experience it. This is an approach that teaches a person to use attention and will to undo lessons learned about pain in the past and transform the unwanted experience.

Furthermore, the methodology does not distinguish between types of pain, as in terms of our basic response, pains from loss, after an accident or from a headache are similar. As such, you can learn to experience pain and reduce suffering when recovering from surgery, from a continuous 20-year-old back pain, premenstrual pain, after a separation or from a painful failure that still haunts you.

The Grinberg Method focuses on the part of our experience that we can control and that is within the scope of our responsibility. What we do with our bodies, how we focus our attention, the level of tension in our muscles, the way we breathe and relax, are all things that we are able to control to some extent. The methodology aims to teach you how to gain control in a focused and efficient way, not as a theoretical idea, but within the experience of your pain and body.

When we react automatically to any kind of pain in order to avoid, fight or split away from it, we perceive ourselves and the life around us as if there were a filter in between. The more persistent and long-term the pain is, the more embedded and systematic is our automatic way of being in relation to pain, which we apply to our thoughts, feelings, actions and interaction with the life that surrounds us. And the more we try to avoid pain, the more our life starts to exist around this effort. If we become angry and frustrated, everything else we do is tainted with the same color; we become irritated with the people closest to us, lose our patience quickly when something is not as we want it to be. We may give up before we even start something, because we are convinced that we will not manage. Muscular efforts make the simplest of movements difficult, we tire quickly and are unable to rest and recuperate, as we cannot fully relax.

As a result, the body finds itself in a constant battle with and against itself; stuck in the same way of thinking, the same persistent mood and constant efforts, repeating endless cycles and allowing little room or possibility for change. This may happen over the course of many years, and the further we fall into the trap of suffering, the more reasons we have to not feel pain.

The Grinberg Method approaches pain with the aim of transforming a situation of stasis in which attention and energy are automatically and constantly invested in avoiding it, into a fluid one in which the body can then recuperate and allow a natural healing process. Often, this reduces the

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suffering, and the original pain disappears or at least diminishes, as the investment of energy and effort to push against the pain, which worsens it, is stopped.



## **What to expect from a Grinberg Method one-on-one process**

### **Learning to pay attention and stop automatic efforts**

Because the way we relate and react to pain is established, repetitive and done automatically without attention, it is often experienced as natural and the only option - so much so that we are unaware of what it is that we are doing. In sessions you learn to pay attention to the full experience: perceive the area that is painful, recognize and experience the way you respond to that pain with your body. Through the practitioners touch and instructions, you learn to identify the efforts and tensions you create in and around the area, the positions or postures that may aggravate it, and your particular way of thinking, feeling, breathing and moving while reacting to feeling the pain.

Your practitioner's guidance aims for you to gain control over the automatic way in which you react so you can stop it. You learn how to free your breathing from repetitive and static patterns, relax contracted muscles and efforts in the body, stop controlling the body with commands from the mind and focus your attention on the pain. You learn to control your automatic response by intentionally creating and then stopping it, focusing on one or more of its aspects at the same time. You gradually improve your control, being able to stop muscular tension as well as more subtle elements of the reaction, such as what your mood is and what you say to yourself while it happens. The more you do it, the more elements of the reaction you are able to stop. And the more proficient you become, the easier it is not to start reacting at all.

### **Letting the body work**

In essence, the work of a practitioner aims to allow your attention to expand in order to create the best conditions for your body to do what it naturally can. We use the term letting the body work to describe the moment after stopping a continuous effort when energy is recuperated and invested in the innate work of the body. Unhindered, the body can then focus and allocate resources to what is relevant and bothers it, like pain, and on healing itself. When this is allowed, the body undergoes different experiences like shivering, sweating, shaking, sensations of hot, cold or electricity, intense flow, or uncontrolled movements, and is filled with vitality and strength. Because pain is related to our survival and existence, it is expected and natural that fear will be part of our experience. Thus, part of allowing the body to work means allowing the energy of fear to flow as well.

### **The work of the practitioner**

All bodies are unique and individual, and each of us has a different potential, personal history, experience of, and reaction to, pain. Although two people may complain of back pain, the experience will not be the same for both. Based on this observation, the teaching and touch of practitioners is adapted to the person they work with. Their choices within a one-on-one process, regarding the design of sessions and the structure of lessons, are done according to the individual, based on the client's experience and what the client needs to learn first. A practitioner does not use formulas or recipes, as no two processes will be the same. Nor does the practitioner give a diagnosis or try to name the client's pain.

When dealing with pain, practitioners use touch and instructions to point to an area and emphasize the efforts made in response to the pain. This is done in order to teach clients to contract and relax, let go of rigidity and tension and focus their attention on having the experience rather than reacting to it. The more advanced the practitioner is, the more eloquent the communication through touch; the practitioner is able to approach the right places with more precision, doing so in a way that is well adapted to the client to achieve a more complete learning of the needed lessons.

### **The client's role**

As a client, your willingness to learn and break life-long habits, your level of involvement, curiosity and interest, and ability to learn to control and stop automatic reactions, all play an important role in defining the success and duration of a one-on-one process. Before starting, your responsibility is to make the necessary medical checks for your condition to be sure that you do not require medical treatment. You are also responsible for your general well-being and for taking care of your health. It is important as well to pay attention to any changes in the condition between sessions and communicate them to your practitioner. This allows your practitioner to evaluate the progress of the sessions and adapt their work with you accordingly. Training and practicing the lessons you learned in the sessions in daily life, will improve the success of your process.

If you begin a one-on-one process because of pain, it should be the first thing that you tell your practitioner. Everything the practitioner does will then be focused on the pain. A session takes one hour and at the beginning your practitioner will spend a short time talking, asking questions about your physical experience of the pain and any changes that have occurred since the last meeting you had. At the end of the session, you will be given instructions related to paying attention to your pain and how to train, using the lessons you have learned in the session, until you meet again. The structure of your process depends on your particular circumstances: the intensity of your pain, the travelling distance between you and a practitioner and other practical considerations.

### **Results and lessons for life**

The basis of a one-on-one process is a partnership between the practitioner and client in which both work towards a common goal. If the process is effective, you will see some results very quickly relating to the level of pain as well as in other aspects of life, such as renewed energy, concentration, rest, improved relationships and a general well-being.

Any process that focuses on pain aims not only to reduce suffering but also to teach invaluable lessons, which can be applied for the rest of the client's life, thereby creating independence. The lessons learned can be practiced without the presence of a practitioner. They can be used when getting hurt, being sick or to pass more easily through a difficult experience.

## **Frequently asked questions**

*What kind of pain is a one-on-one process relevant for?*

The Grinberg Method approaches pain on all levels. It does not distinguish between different kinds or types of pain, but relates to the experience of it as part of our natural ability to draw attention to what the body requires. As such, a one-on-one process could be relevant for cyclical and repetitive premenstrual pain, lower back pain, and migraines, just as much as with the pain of failure, a separation or loss. In any event, focus will be given to the individual's experience of the pain. The methodology is not relevant for people with life-threatening conditions like cancer, or for pain that requires hospitalization, continuous prescribed strong painkillers or psychiatric attention.

*Should I stop the medication I am taking when I start a process?*

On the contrary, a Grinberg Method process does not require that you stop any treatment, and specifies that it is only your doctor who can make a decision about your medication or treatment.

*Should I delay surgery until after a process?*

Only you, with your doctor, can decide whether to have surgery or not. A one-on-one process is not a replacement for any medical treatment. A practitioner is not trained to advise you and cannot make such a judgment.

*Are there any conditions that a practitioner cannot work with?*

A practitioner cannot work with conditions that are life threatening or with mental illnesses. Before you begin a one-on-one process, you will be asked to fill out and sign a questionnaire that requires you to declare any current or past health-related conditions. This allows the practitioner to determine whether it is possible for you to start a process.

*What if my condition is genetic?*

If the condition is not life threatening, a practitioner can work with you to manage any pain related to the condition. Working with a practitioner may enable you to deal with pain more effectively and improve your general well-being, but will not change the condition itself.

*Is there anything I should or should not do before a session?*

We recommend you do not eat large meals within two hours beforehand to avoid digestive activity during the session. We also recommend that you do not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs before a session (this does not refer to medication) as it impairs your ability to be attentive and learn.

*Is age a criterion in order to become a client in a one-on-one process?*

There are no age restrictions: a one-on-one process for pain is relevant for anyone as long as they are capable of learning. Furthermore, as we experience and develop reactions to pain when we are children, it can be very beneficial to come and learn at a young age.

*Do I have to believe in anything for it to work?*

The method has no ideological, moral, mystical or religious connotations. It does not teach a

model of how to be healthy, and there are no principles that you should follow. You will be taught to train in your daily life, to focus your attention and practice stopping. Your satisfaction should be based on the results that are achieved rather than the truth of an idea. As a process is a partnership between the client and practitioner, you should be able to trust your practitioner in order to allow the best conditions for learning.

*Is it a massage?*

No, a practitioner does not seek to affect the body of the client or use touch to achieve a therapeutic effect. All the tools of a practitioner, including touch, are used with the aim of increasing the client's ability to pay attention – developing body attention - and experiencing the body fully. The aim of a session is to create a situation in which the body is allowed to do its work and is not blocked by reactions to pain.

*Is it a form of alternative medicine?*

No, the Grinberg Method does not exchange any kind of medicine or treatment and is not an alternative to anything. It is a methodology through which you can learn.

*Can I do other techniques or therapies while I am doing a one-on-one process?*

Yes you can. However, if you combine other techniques or therapies with your process, it will be more difficult for you and your practitioner to determine which one is working for you. If you do any other techniques or therapies, we recommend that they support the work of the process.

*How do I know if it is working?*

If it works, you will begin to notice changes in relation to your pain and your general well-being after a few sessions. If you do not notice any change after eight sessions, then it does not work for you. You should also be able to see that the aim of the process is achieved in your daily life. If you are not clear or sure, you can ask your practitioner to go to a private lesson with a teacher of the Grinberg Method who can give an external assessment of the process.

*What is the worst that can happen?*

The worst that can happen is that it does not work. You may observe a period in which your pain appears to intensify. However, this should only be temporary, and if this is not the case then your condition may have deteriorated and you should consult a doctor.

*How long does a process last?*

A process focused on pain ends when the pain experienced disappears and does not return, meaning that the client has learned to stop the automatic reaction to pain. The amount of sessions required depends on the practitioner's ability, the level of motivation, attention and concentration of the client, and the duration and complexity of the condition. A process should not continue if there are no results.

*Is there anything I can do to enhance the process?*

A process is more effective if you have ongoing and regular sessions. You can also learn exercises with a trainer of the Grinberg Method that you can practice at home.

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*How much does a session cost?*

The price of a session is based on the experience of your practitioner in terms of training, years of practice and their level of attention.

*What other activities does the Grinberg Method offer?*

There are various workshops, classes and groups taught by licensed teachers and trainers, which could be complementary to the aims of the one-on-one process. A two-day workshop on learning to manage pain is taught in most countries where the Grinberg Method is practiced. To find out more information about these activities you can go to the official website at

[www.GrinbergMethod.com](http://www.GrinbergMethod.com), where current activities are listed or which will direct you to the websites of teachers and trainers relevant for you. You can also ask your practitioner directly.

## **Exercise – paying attention and stopping your reaction to pain**

The following is an exercise that can be practiced alone. It aims to give you an experience of the concepts that the Grinberg Method uses to transform pain. Although it is by no means comparable to receiving a session and learning from a practitioner, it gives an idea of what you can experience through the methodology.

### **Step by step**

1. Choose one specific pain and describe it in writing (where you feel it, when, how intensely and what kind of a pain it is) in order to focus your attention on it.
2. Sit in a chair, close your eyes and pay attention for a few minutes to what you do to go against the pain (for example, tightening the jaw, breathing shallowly, raising your shoulders, tensing an area, trying not to feel the pain). Then write it down.
3. Go back to the chair, close your eyes and again notice all the efforts and increase all of them a little bit. For example, if you raise your shoulders, raise them a bit more. If you contract your jaw muscles, contract them more. Maintain these efforts for about a minute and then drop them all at once. For example, drop your shoulders, relax your jaw and breathe deeply. Then pay attention to the physical experience.
4. Notice the change in your body, and then pay attention to the efforts that you did not notice before such as curling your toes, tensing your legs and contracting your eyes. Write those down too.
5. Start another round of increasing efforts and include what you noticed after stopping a first time. Increase all the efforts, maintain them for about a minute, and then drop them again. Breathe deeply, relax, and allow the body to do what it wants. Do not try to control or command it, but give it the freedom to be for a few minutes.
6. Repeat increasing and stopping efforts again. Each time, you may notice other things that you do to avoid pain, and can include them in the exercise.

By doing this exercise, you are intentionally producing your reaction to pain and learning to stop it. The time in which you relax in the chair, is the time that you let your body work.

It is a simple exercise but does require concentration and attention. Should you wish to practice, we recommend that you do it more than once in sets, for a of maximum 15-20 minutes each set, which includes a description, producing and stopping the reaction and allowing the body to work.

## **Getting started**

We hope that this booklet has accomplished its aim of communicating and providing information on the Grinberg Method's approach to dealing with pain and what to expect from a one-on-one process.

We teach people how to deal with their pain by focusing and expanding their attention in order to create the conditions needed to fully experience pain and allow the body to deal with the origins of it.

The Grinberg Method has the vision and aim of changing people's perception of pain; educating and teaching about pain and how to deal with it effectively, and thus reducing suffering. It offers this possibility through one-on-one learning processes, workshops focused on pain, as well as many other group activities. The concepts that the Grinberg Method teaches can be learned from an early age as part of an individual's preparation for life. A person who learns about pain at a young age has a better chance of experiencing a more fulfilled life and of being able to better deal with whatever pain life brings him.

Today there are several hundred practitioners of the Grinberg Method in Europe, Israel and North America; licensed trainers offer various group activities in Austria, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

If you would like further information about the Grinberg Method, visit the official site [www.GrinbergMethod.com](http://www.GrinbergMethod.com), where you will also find the contact details of teachers and trainers, as well as links to the practitioners' association of the Grinberg Method that will help you find a practitioner and activities in different countries.