

# Live Well With Chronic Illness

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## Acceptance as a Coping Tool for Chronic Illness:

### What It Is and How It Helps



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## QUALIFICATIONS:

- ✓ Naturopathic Nutrition and Health Coaching: *Diploma-College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM)*
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# Disclaimer



The information in this presentation is intended for information and educational purposes only.

It is not medical advice.

You should always consult your doctor about your own particular conditions, and ensure that you do your own research before making any changes to your diet.

I am not medically qualified, and this information is not a substitute for medical advice, or diagnosis.

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# Acceptance

Can feel like a difficult subject with chronic illness

What does that mean for you – how do you feel about the concept of acceptance?

When I say ‘you could practice acceptance’, how does that make you feel?



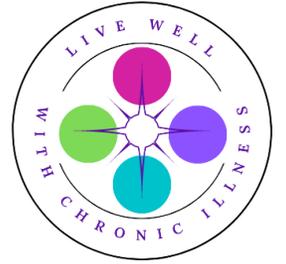


**See if you can give yourself gifts that may be true blessings, such as self-acceptance.**

***Jon Kabat-Zinn***



# The Attitudes of Mindfulness



Beginners Mind



Non-Judging



Acceptance



Letting Go



Trust



Patience



Non-striving



Gratitude



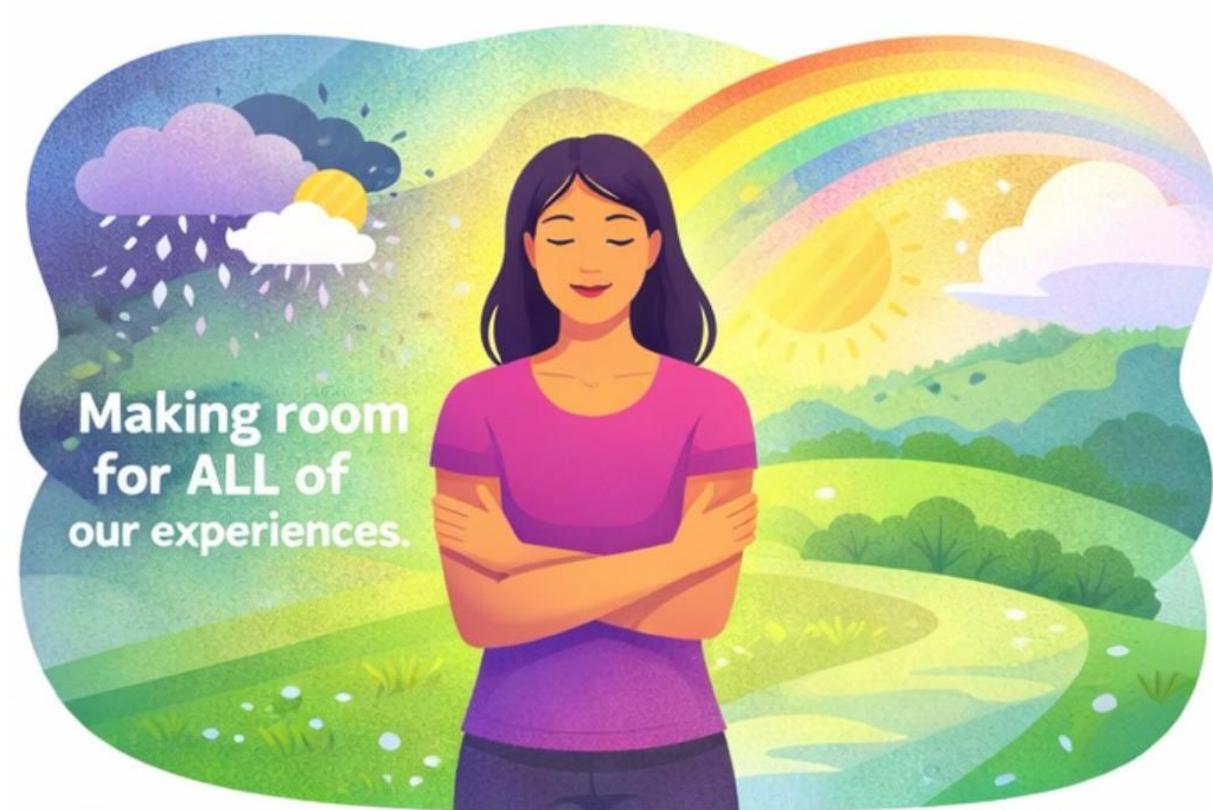
Generosity



Kindness



Compassion





# What is Acceptance?

Acceptance is about giving space to what is already there

## Acknowledging/Allowing

Observing and acknowledging what is happening for us in any given moment and exploring it with curiosity.

Thoughts, emotions, sensations, situations - notice and allow them to be as they are.

Acknowledge the truth of the present moment reality, whether we like it or not. Acceptance does not mean that we have to be happy with something

Clear-seeing awareness





# What Acceptance is NOT

- ♥ Tolerating unacceptable behaviour
- ♥ Giving up
- ♥ Surrendering
- ♥ Fatalism
- ♥ Resignation
- ♥ Denial
- ♥ Not giving up on treatment or stopping advocacy for better health.
- ♥ Not equating pain/disability with happiness—pain can be unpleasant even with acceptance.

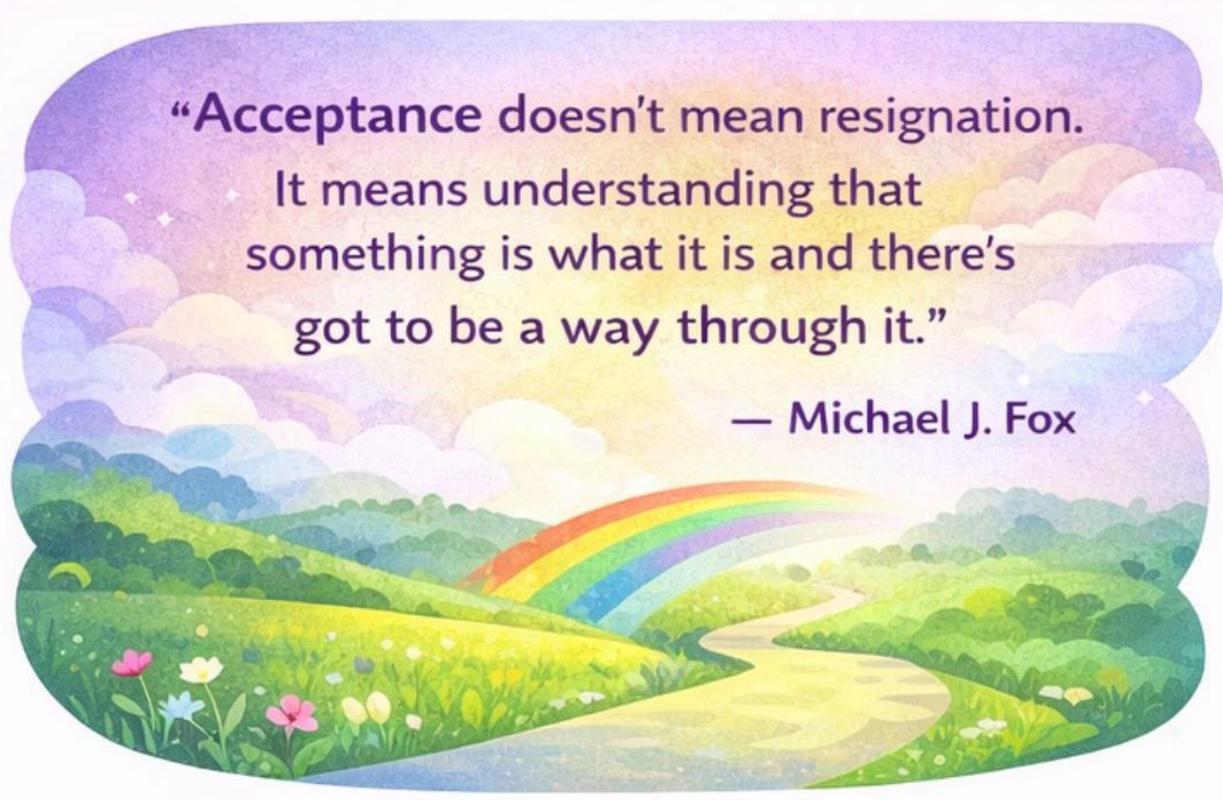


# Does Acceptance Mean Giving Up?



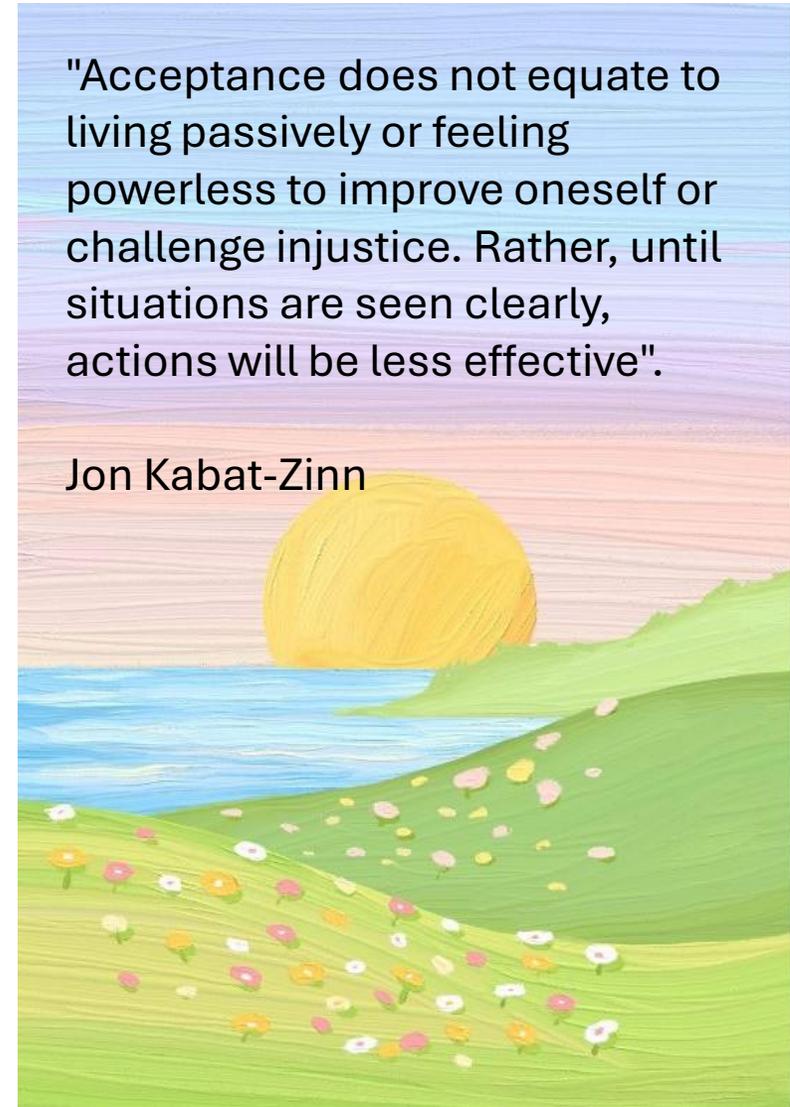
**“Acceptance doesn’t mean resignation.  
It means understanding that  
something is what it is and there’s  
got to be a way through it.”**

**— Michael J. Fox**



"Acceptance does not equate to living passively or feeling powerless to improve oneself or challenge injustice. Rather, until situations are seen clearly, actions will be less effective".

Jon Kabat-Zinn



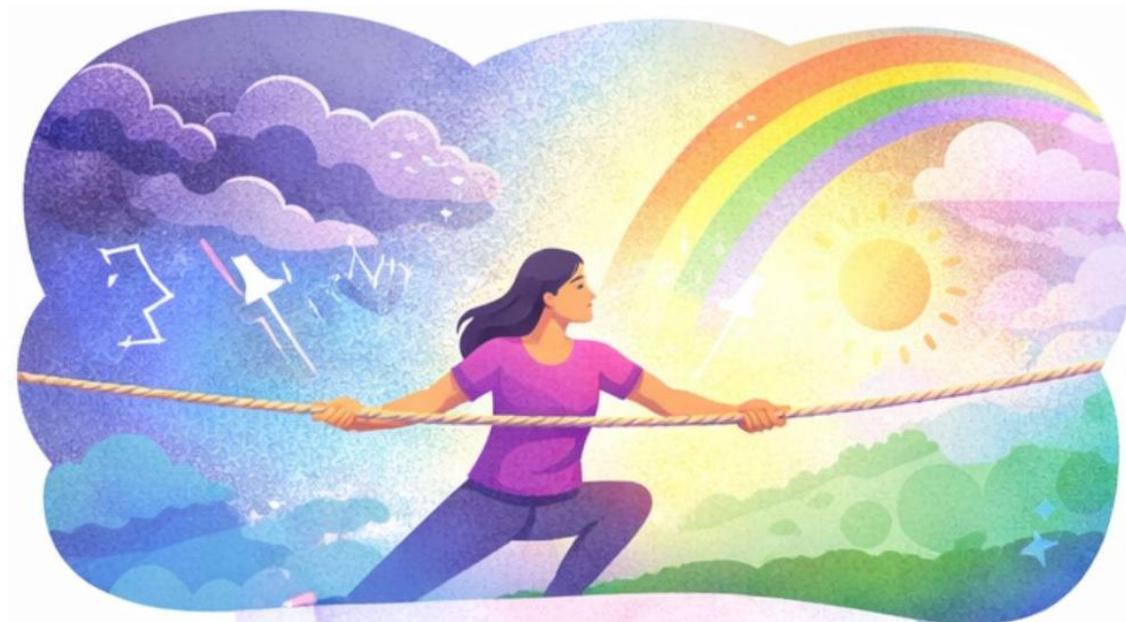


# Another Way to Look at It

It's letting go of trying to control the uncontrollable.

It reduces unhelpful, unnecessary struggle

Frees up energy for valuable action.



**Trying to control the uncontrollable**

# Why people find acceptance hard



## Emotional Resistance

Loss, grief, and identity changes make the idea of acceptance emotionally challenging. You want to resist this ‘new reality’.

## Cultural Messages

Society values fighting, fixing, and control. Acceptance seems counter-cultural, although it’s not passive. But it seems like ‘wrong’.

## Misinterpretations

People equate acceptance with “giving up” which fuels resistance.

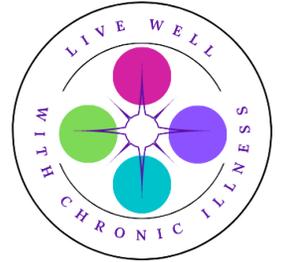
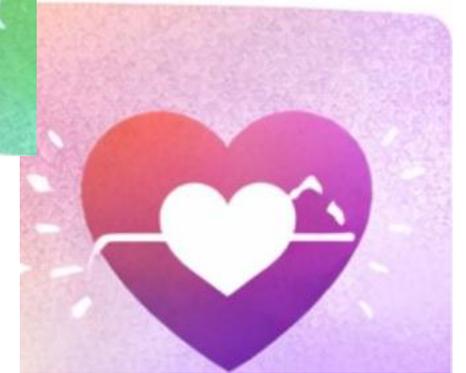


# Evidence

**Humble et al. (2003)** — *Acceptance of pain is an independent predictor of mental well-being in patients with chronic pain*  
Higher acceptance of pain predicted better mental well-being.

**McCracken & Zhao-O'Brien (2009)** — *General psychological acceptance and chronic pain*. In chronic pain patients, general acceptance of unwanted experiences (not limited to pain) was significantly correlated with lower depression, anxiety, physical disability, and psychosocial distress.

**Hreńczuk et al. (2024)** — *Acceptance of illness and health behaviours in haemodialysis patients*. In end-stage renal disease patients, higher acceptance of illness correlated positively with stronger health-related behaviours, such as preventive actions, positive attitudes, and better health practices, factors that contribute to overall adaptation and quality of life.



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<https://www.mdpi.com/2227-9032/12/24/2562>



# These Studies Show...

- ♥ Acceptance is a measurable psychological process
- ♥ Higher levels of acceptance predict better psychological outcomes (e.g., lower depression, increased well-being).
- ♥ Acceptance correlates with better functioning and fewer disability symptoms in chronic pain.
- ♥ Fluctuations in acceptance correlate with actual day-to-day changes in mood and functioning, showing acceptance is helping with real-time coping.
- ♥ Acceptance of illness is linked with better engagement in health behaviours, which is critical for disease management and adaptation.





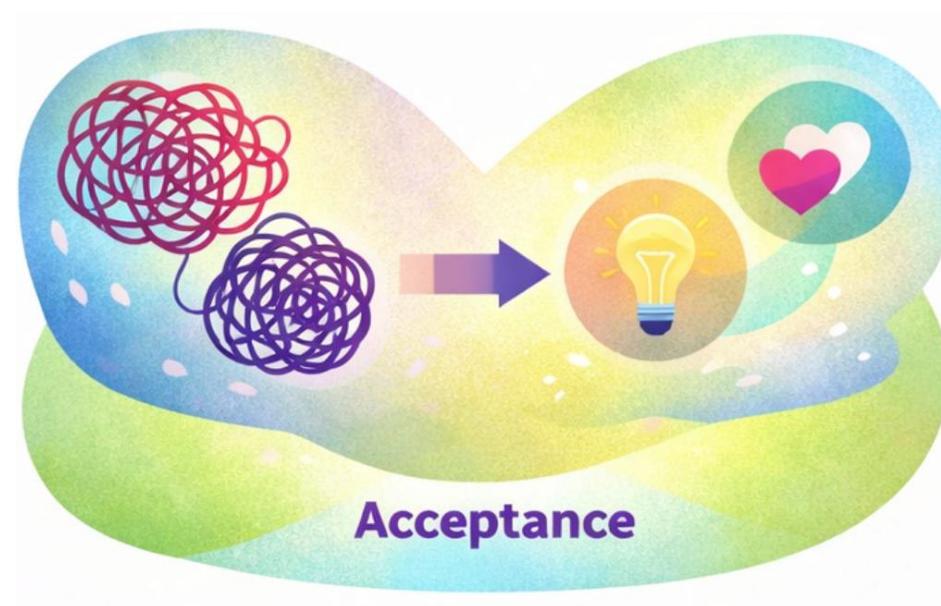
# Acceptance and Non-Judgement

2018 study – when ‘monitoring’ is combined with ‘acceptance’ in meditation has a greater effect on wellbeing

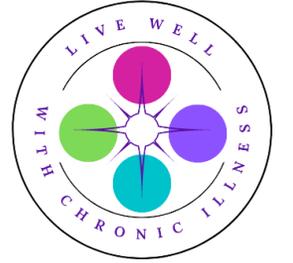
- ♥ Monitoring – just observing what’s there
- ♥ Acceptance – to resist the urge to judge our experiences, allowing what’s there with kindness.

Allow our feelings, emotions, thoughts and physical sensations to be there, without being defined by them, or judging ourselves for having that experience.

- ♥ Observing them, sitting with them, allowing them, staying with them in the body, exploring them a little bit with curiosity.
- ♥ Resist urge to judge, attach like or dislike, welcome whatever is there, with friendly kindness.



# Practice



## PRACTICE

Pick something not too difficult to work with – a sensation or area of difficulty

Softly leaning into the discomfort, and practice acceptance, without judging, without criticism.

**How did you find that?**



# Two Arrows

In Buddhism, this concept is known as the 'Two Arrows'

The first arrow, painful experiences, is inevitable.

Everyone will experience loss, pain, worries

That is a normal state of life, that happens to us all.

The second arrow, is the one we fire into ourselves

By resisting the suffering, pushing away

By feeling ashamed of the suffering, embarrassed, guilty, fear  
and anxious about the suffering

That creates a 'second pain' which is optional - we have some degree of  
choice and control about that.



# Stop Fighting with Ourselves

Our bodies and minds are programmed to resist suffering, and to try and avoid it. Escape, reject, suppress, avoid.

Creates constant state of conflict in the body.

Stuck in Fight or Flight

Adrenaline and cortisol - affects inflammation, immunity and digestion, and activates the amygdala which stops calm, rational, adaptive behaviour.

Present-moment acceptance feeds in 'safety' – we are not currently in danger

Stops the internal 'fight or flight' state in our bodies.

We allow our bodies to enter a healing rest and digest state, which allows them to begin to repair.



# The Difference between Acceptance and Surrender



Does Acceptance mean giving up? NO!

Acceptance is practiced in the PRESENT MOMENT.

Right now, I accept what is here for me

Whatever I am feeling and experiencing right now. I stop fighting it.

It DOES NOT mean giving up hope of recovery, or improvement in the future.

It does NOT mean that you give up helping yourself, eg medical advice, nutrition, movement, sleep, taking supplements and medications etc

It just means you stop fighting with yourself and with what is happening in the present moment



# Summary



Acceptance is a tool – a way of making our brains do what we want.

- ♥ It helps us to relax .
- ♥ It helps us to reduce our suffering in the moment, we don't fire that second arrow at ourselves
- ♥ It helps us to listen to our bodies, without judgment
- ♥ It helps us to focus on helpful behaviours that improve wellbeing
- ♥ It helps us to switch off fight or flight mode and reduce unhelpful stress hormones
- ♥ It calms our nervous system and helps us enter rest and digest mode

It does not mean giving up, and it does not mean you stop hoping for the future. It is practiced in the present moment



# Acceptance Practice



## 3-Step process on accepting difficulty in the moment

1. Observe an area of discomfort or a difficult sensation (if it feels ok)
2. Accept it, just for now, allow it to be – tell it you acknowledge it, you ‘let it be’
3. Offer yourself (and your body) kindness and compassion and forgiveness

Ask yourself, what is one thing I can do to make this easier for myself?

You don't have to practice a full-on meditation to deal with this – you can do it as a quick 3-step process for yourself wherever you are, whatever you are doing

It's not the sensation that matters, it's the quality of your attention – non-judgemental, compassionate, accepting



# Contacts



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## Contacts



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# The End

## Thank you for Listening

