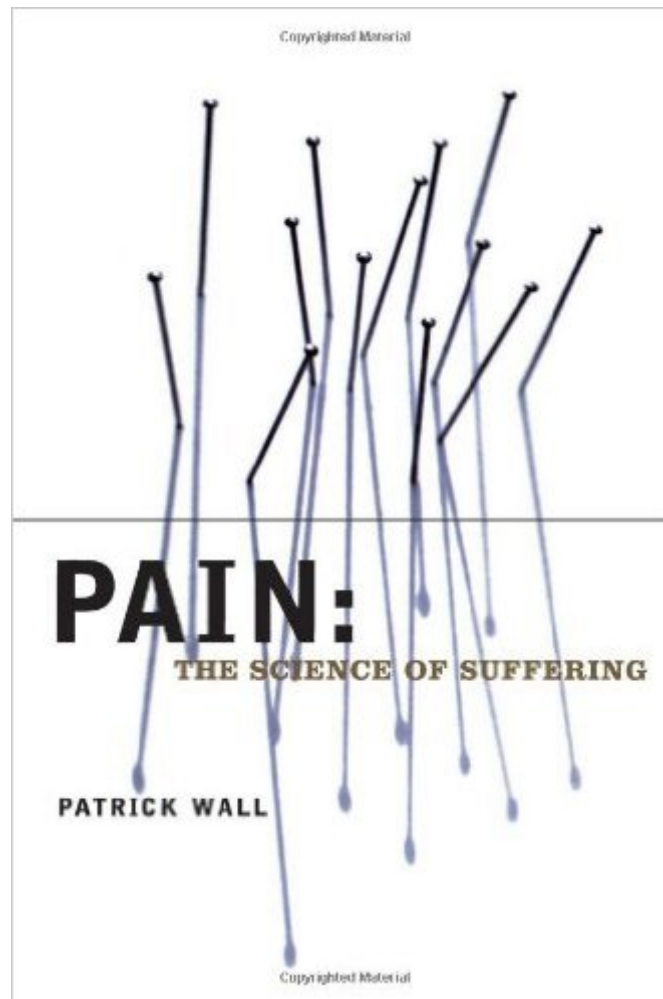


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# Pain: The Science Of Suffering (Maps Of The Mind)



## Synopsis

Pain is one of medicine's greatest mysteries. When farmer John Mitson caught his hand in a baler, he cut off his trapped hand and carried it to a neighbor. "Sheer survival and logic" was how he described it. "And strangely, I didn't feel any pain." How can this be? We're taught that pain is a warning message to be heeded at all costs, yet it can switch off in the most agonizing circumstances or switch on for no apparent reason. Many scientists, philosophers, and laypeople imagine pain to operate like a rigid, simple signaling system, as if a particular injury generates a fixed amount of pain that simply gets transmitted to the brain; yet this mechanistic model is woefully lacking in the face of the surprising facts about what people and animals do and experience when their bodies are damaged. Patrick Wall looks at these questions and sets his scientific account in a broad context, interweaving it with a wealth of fascinating and sometimes disturbing historical detail, such as famous characters who derived pleasure from pain, the unexpected reactions of injured people, the role of endorphins, and the power of placebo. He covers cures of pain, ranging from drugs and surgery, through relaxation techniques and exercise, to acupuncture, electrical nerve stimulation, and herbalism. Pain involves our state of mind, our social mores and beliefs, and our personal experiences and expectations. Stepping beyond the famous neurologic gate-control theory for which he is known, Wall shows that pain is a matter of behavior and its manifestation differs among individuals, situations, and cultures. "The way we deal with pain is an expression of individuality."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A word of advice: as the author states in the preface, this book is NOT a textbook, nor a do-it-yourself recipe book for pain relief. It is a work of communication for educated laymen "intended to give the readers the power of understanding processes in their own body." If the topic were not so grim, one could describe this work as "fascinating and fun." The topics he touches on range from studies of Yom Kippur War survivors to biofeedback training, from migraine auras to the sensitivity of babies to pain, from hand injuries to cannabis, and from nerve regeneration to the attention mechanism in ducklings and monkeys. The slim volume is filled with anecdote and humor, as well as with suffering. He reminds us that pain frequently occurs without physiological basis, and that pain sometimes fails to kick in when we are severely ill. ---- Dr. Patrick Wall (a British professor of physiology who started his career 40 years ago as a neuroscientist) is the author of several other books about pain. He unfortunately has first hand knowledge of pain. He is the victim of cancer. ---- This volume explains what we have learned in recent years about pain - and is honest about the vast amount of ignorance still to be conquered. After examining the corpus of knowledge - much of it gained in the last few decades -- in the first nine chapters, Dr. Wall brings together "all the phenomena we have discussed in the previous chapters and ask[s] what precisely is going on in someone who senses pain" in Chapter 10. His purpose: "a profound understanding one's own pain has itself a therapeutic effect and proposes a rationale for therapy." This is a fascinating summary of the status of knowledge to today. It is a work that invites re-reading.

I was attracted to this book because earlier in my life I had experienced chronic pain for 8 years. The search for relief was ultimately successful, but the path to finding that relief was long and arduous. What I learned in the process didn't help me very much for being able to advise others, so I hoped this book would help. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Pain contains more information about pain than all that I learned in my personal journey. "Any knowledge that brings patients into a clearer appreciation of their condition decreases their anxiety," says the author, Patrick Wall who is a pain researcher and was suffering from pain related to cancer while authoring the book. Wall's basic point is that pain is related to many different parts of the brain and body, and is affected by our psychology. Little is known about many aspects of pain, and there is little focus on pain relief in medical training or medical research. Wall knows that the fear of pain is often worse than the pain, so he makes the subject amazingly pleasant. I expected to be depressed by reading the book, and

felt elated instead as I learned more about the causes of pain. The book starts up with case histories where people with severe injuries report no initial pain. The reason seems to be that they were still in a survival mode, and surviving concentrated their attention away from the wound and potential pain. Many frequent "mysteries" of pain are also explored like people who have lost limbs and feel pain in the lost part of the limb. You will also learn about fascinating experiments to identify causes of pain and their relief. The book goes on to discuss the sources of pain, how treatments interact with those sources, and how placebo effects can reduce pain. For example, did you know that pessimistic people report more pain than others? As a result, I learned that it is normal to have some residual pain from my earlier experiences. I need not be concerned that full pain will return. That was a nice relief. I suspect that you, too, will lose some of the unnecessary sources of your concerns about pain. And that will probably, in turn, reduce the pain you will experience in your future. While that is happening, you should examine other areas of your life where you fear the worst. That could be a harmful misconception. Why not begin to expect the best instead? Think about it. There may be another placebo effect to help you there also.

Who better to spend a few evenings with (metaphorically) than Patrick Wall, the man who literally, with Ronald Melzack, wrote the (text)book about pain? Wall is now in the twilight of his still productive career. In this refreshing book, he gives an overview of what he has learned. He distinguishes among normal, i.e. biologically useful, and abnormal pain. He discusses at length the placebo response, showing fascinating data that it may be found even among animals. His main point is that pain may be seen as a preparation for response, hence the essential role of attention in the experience. This book is for the educated layman with a curiosity about the ubiquitous yet misunderstood phenomenon of pain. It will also be of considerable interest to the physician treating pain.

Having my back crushed, head smacked to the point of significant subdural hematoma, ribs broken crushing one lung and vertebrae in my spine. I survived. It's been twelve years since that day. That day was followed by months of hospital and in patient rehab at which point I was scurried home to lick my wounds and later return to work with half my back fused and now three inches shorter than the man that previously stood unstoppable looking in the mirror. Nobody forced me to go back to work. It was in my DNA, or at least I thought it to be. Dr. Wall sheds light on so many personal, societal and inherent physiological issues that plague so many people touched by severe chronic pain. This book covers everything so pointedly, I cannot point to a single one at the risk of demoting

others. I have read and re-read this book about five times. It both reduces me to tears and empowers me to believe in myself...it has become my bible to my new life fraught with daunting struggles that each day brings. While I might find myself each day at the bottom of Sisyphus's hill, I also know that each day brings new hope. I must live each day as it may be my last...we all must realize our own immortality. How rare is a book that makes you feel like each page, each sentence are direct answers to the questions you need answered for your own survival!

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