

CHRONIC PAIN

Chronic Pain Could Be a Silent Echo of Unprocessed Emotions

Research findings indicate that 84 percent of adults with chronic pain experienced unresolved childhood trauma.

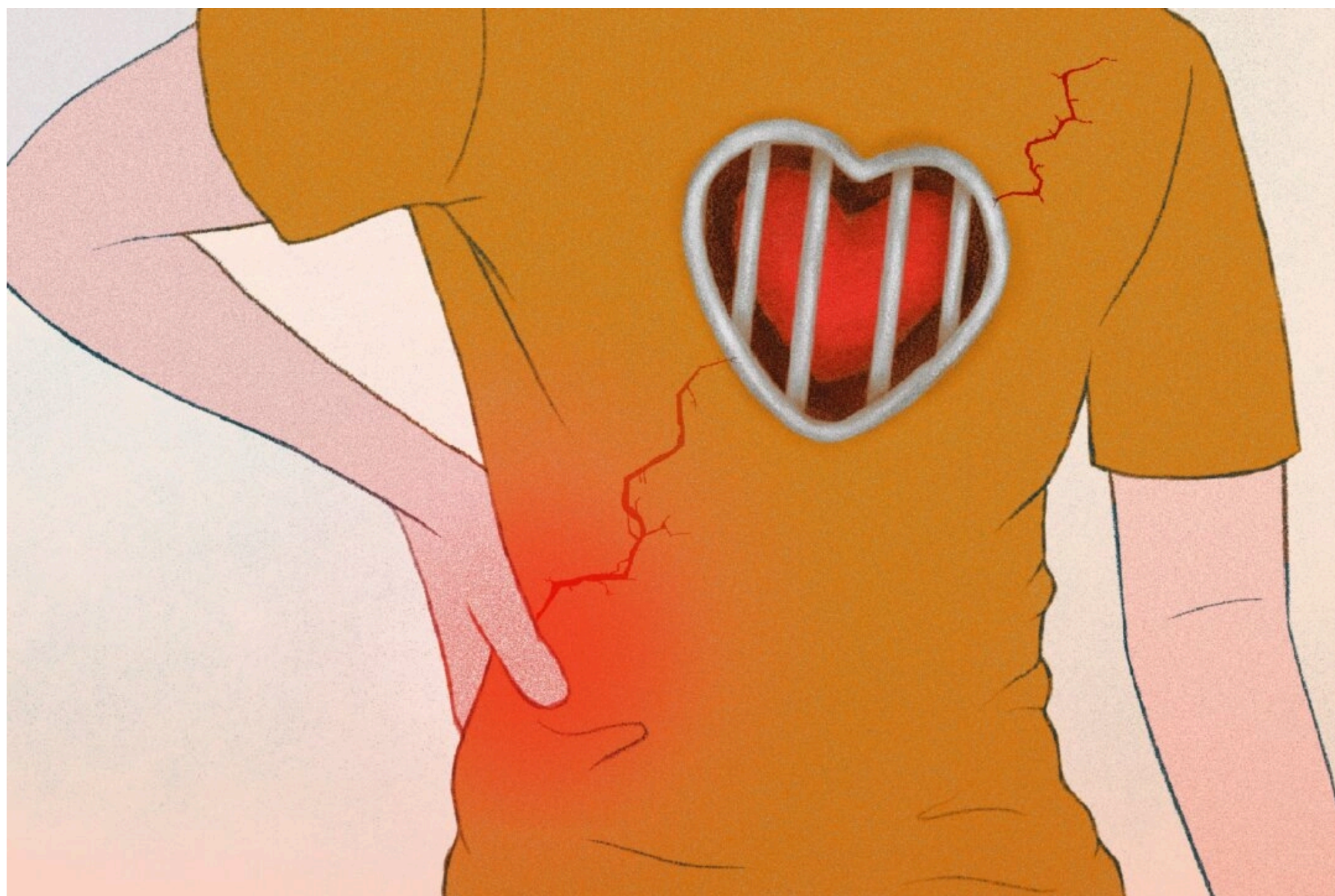
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Illustration by The Epoch Times

By [Zena le Roux](#)

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Chronic pain isn't just a matter of aching muscles or lingering injuries—it can also be a silent echo of unprocessed emotions.

Surprisingly, the roots of persistent pain often stretch back to early life experiences, with a strong connection between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and chronic pain. Studies find that ACEs are linked to heightened pain catastrophizing (expecting the worst from pain) and pain complications (additional problems from chronic pain) later in life, as well as depression.

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[Research](#) indicates that 84 percent of adults with chronic pain report experiencing at least one ACE, compared to nearly 62 percent of the general population. Additionally, the incidence of chronic pain appears to double among people with ACEs, and these individuals often experience increased pain severity.

“Ninety-three percent of patients referred to us for fibromyalgia pain had significant, unaddressed ACEs,” Elaine Wilkins, a coach, National Health Service (NHS) trainer, and founder of The Chrysalis Effect, an online program for recovering from myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME)/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), and fibromyalgia, told The Epoch Times. [Fibromyalgia](#) is a common chronic condition that causes muscle pain throughout the body.

Specifically, childhood neglect and abuse—whether physical or sexual—are associated with conditions such as fibromyalgia in adulthood, with physical abuse more strongly related. Furthermore, a history of physical abuse during childhood has been linked to a higher risk of neck and back pain in adulthood.

This seems to be because childhood adversity can significantly alter stress reactivity and lead to immunological dysregulation, which is associated with increased inflammation and may result in widespread pain. Studies have shown that severe inflammation can persist in individuals with multiple ACEs, even up to 30 years later.

These early experiences, while often preverbal, are stored in the brain as feeling memories, triggering emotions that become trapped in the body, Wilkins added.

The period before age 6 is particularly critical for neuroendocrine development, making childhood a sensitive time for emotional and physiological growth. Prolonged exposure to stressors during this developmental window can be especially traumatizing.

According to a [study](#) in The Lancet Regional Health Americas, ACEs have an impact on adult survival and health. More specifically, children with two or more ACEs had a higher risk of dying young.



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“We now understand that the brain processes physical and emotional pain using the same pathways, so what you feel is real,” Wilkins said.

As a society, we often fail to recognize the physical impact of emotions on the body. Grobler explained that just as a hip injury can cause pain in the knee, we don’t dismiss the knee pain as it’s “all in your head.” Yet when it comes to emotional pain, people often resort to these dismissive attitudes.

A ‘Smoke Alarm’

“Pain is the body’s way of asking you to pay attention, signaling that something is not right. It’s like a smoke alarm,” explained Wilkins. It prompts people to change.

However, instead of listening to this wisdom, many people continue engaging in behaviors that perpetuate their pain, resorting to self-medication with pills, alcohol, overworking, overspending, or people-pleasing to maintain approval. This tendency is powerful when unresolved trauma makes us prioritize attachment (staying connected to our caregivers) over authenticity (developing a sense of self).

Grobler adds that since pain is a message, if we rush to eliminate it, we miss the opportunity to understand its underlying cause and may even harm ourselves further, much like how taking pain medication to push through an injury can exacerbate it.

“Perhaps we need to reflect and sit with the pain, asking ourselves: What am I not hearing?” Grobler suggested. “It’s like a baby crying without being able to speak. Is it hungry, cold, or does it have a stomachache? Sometimes, it’s a matter of trial and error. Pain doesn’t come with a language.”

Addressing Pain

When experiencing chronic pain that you suspect might be due to emotions or adverse childhood experiences, Grobler emphasized the importance of seeking therapy, as it provides an opportunity to analyze, comprehend, and express feelings that you may have suppressed for a long time.



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Wilkins recommended journaling when experiencing a flare-up to reflect on any events, conflicts, stressors, and emotions that may have contributed to the situation. She suggests asking yourself the following questions:

- What has affected me so profoundly that my body is urging me to listen?
- If I am being 100 percent honest, what do I truly want to do?
- What am I dreading, or whom do I want to avoid seeing?
- What is my pain helping me avoid?
- Am I moving my body enough?
- What activities have I given up that I once loved?

Grobler used a gas chamber as a metaphor: The buildup of emotion is like gas accumulation. The key lies in finding the underlying stressors and ways to “open the door” and permit this pent-up energy to release, she said.

A special invitation from our Editor-in-Chief, Jasper Fakkert



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