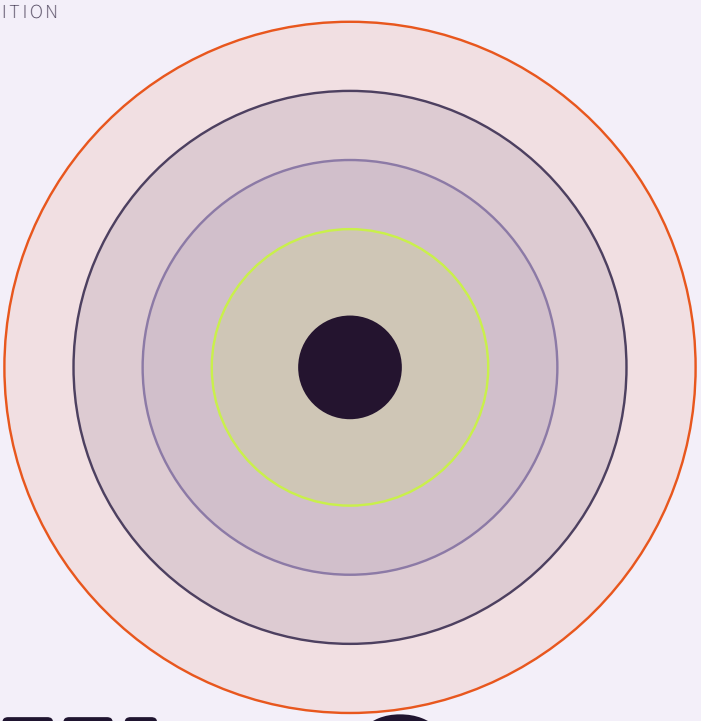


# The Way Out: A Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven Approach to Healing Chronic Pain

A reading of the book by Alan Gordon and Alon Ziv (2021)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Way Out: A Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven Approach to Healing Chronic Pain, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

# The book in a minute

Alan Gordon is a psychotherapist and the founder of the Pain Psychology Center in Los Angeles, and he lived with chronic pain himself for years. Written with the science writer Alon Ziv, The Way Out argues that much chronic pain is neuroplastic: real pain produced by the brain, which has learned to read safe signals from the body as danger. Gordon's method, Pain Reprocessing Therapy, aims to retrain that alarm. It works by gathering evidence that the pain is neuroplastic, watching sensations through a lens of safety (somatic tracking), lowering fear, and building up pleasant feelings. The book draws on Gordon's own pain, his patients' stories, and the 2021 Boulder Back Pain Study, a randomised trial of the method in adults with chronic back pain.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

# The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Chronic pain can be real pain with no damage behind it: the brain's alarm, stuck on.

Gordon calls this neuroplastic pain. Pain is a danger signal the brain sends, and most of the time it tracks an injury. Sometimes the brain learns the pain and keeps sending it after the tissues have healed, or when there was never an injury at all. The pain is just as real either way.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Fear is the fuel: the more the brain worries about the pain, the louder it plays it.

The book describes a pain-fear cycle. Pain makes you afraid, fear tells the brain you are in danger, and a brain in danger mode turns the pain up. Breaking the cycle starts with the fear, because that is the part you can work on directly.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Watch the sensation with curiosity instead of dread, and the alarm starts to quiet.

Somatic tracking is the core skill of the method. For a few minutes you pay attention to the pain itself, noticing where it is and what it feels like, while reminding yourself that it is safe to feel. The aim is to send the brain a message of safety from the very place it expects danger.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Your own evidence persuades your brain more than anyone's reassurance.

Gordon asks readers to gather clues that their pain is neuroplastic: pain that came on without an injury, comes and goes, moves around, or flares with stress rather than movement. A list of real examples from your own life is harder for a worried brain to dismiss than a general promise.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Don't try to make the pain stop while you watch it. Trying tells the brain it is dangerous.

The book calls this outcome independence. If every tracking session is a test of whether the pain went away, the brain stays on guard. Watching without needing a result is what makes the safety message believable.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## Feeling good is part of the treatment, not a reward for finishing it.

Pleasant sensations and emotions are signals of safety too. Gordon encourages readers to notice warmth, comfort and enjoyment on purpose, because a brain that feels safe has less reason to sound the alarm.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## Pressure and self-criticism keep the nervous system on guard, even when they have nothing to do with the pain.

The danger the brain reacts to is not only physical. Constant worry, harsh self-talk and pushing yourself to be perfect all tell the body that something is wrong. Easing those habits lowers the overall level of threat the alarm is responding to.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## A flare-up on the way to getting better is part of the process, not proof it has failed.

Recovery rarely runs in a straight line. When the pain returns after a good stretch, the book's advice is to treat it with the same calm you practise in tracking, rather than as a sign that the old fear was right all along.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## Rule out the fire before you question the alarm.

The approach is meant for pain that a doctor has examined and found no structural cause to explain. In the Boulder trial, everyone had a medical evaluation first. Getting checked is the first step, not a detour.

PUT IT TO WORK

# Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Get checked first
- [ ] Start an evidence file
- [ ] Draw your pain timeline
- [ ] Answer your scariest pain thoughts
- [ ] Pick one thing you've stopped doing

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Track for five minutes a day
- ◯ Catch the body checks
- ◯ Add to the file every week

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

# Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

# The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

# The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

## Get checked first

Book a visit with your doctor before you try any of this, and bring a short list of your symptoms and when they started.

Ask directly whether there is a structural cause that needs treating.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

## Start an evidence file

Write down every clue that your pain behaves like a signal rather than damage: times it moved, came and went, or flared with stress.

Use real dates and real examples, not general impressions.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

## Draw your pain timeline

On one page, mark when each symptom began.

Next to each, note what else was happening in your life at the time: a move, a loss, a new job, a hard year.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

## Answer your scariest pain thoughts

List three things you fear about the pain, such as never getting better.

For each, write a calmer reply that is also true, and keep the page where you can find it during a flare.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

## Pick one thing you've stopped doing

Choose one activity the pain made you give up.

With your clinician's go-ahead, plan a small, easy first step back into it this month.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

# Track for five minutes a day

Sit somewhere comfortable and watch one sensation with curiosity for five minutes.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 ○ | 7 ○ | 8 ○ |
| 9 ○ | 10 ○ | 11 ○ | 12 ○ | 13 ○ | 14 ○ | 15 ○ |
| 16 ○ | 17 ○ | 18 ○ | 19 ○ | 20 ○ | 21 ○ | 22 ○ |
| 23 ○ | 24 ○ | 25 ○ | 26 ○ | 27 ○ | 28 ○ | 29 ○ |
| 30 ○ | | | | | | |

## December 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

# Catch the body checks

Notice when you scan your body to see whether the pain is there.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

# Add to the file every week

Once a week, spend ten minutes adding new clues to your evidence file.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 ○ | 7 ○ | 8 ○ |
| 9 ○ | 10 ○ | 11 ○ | 12 ○ | 13 ○ | 14 ○ | 15 ○ |
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| 30 ○ | | | | | | |

## December 2026

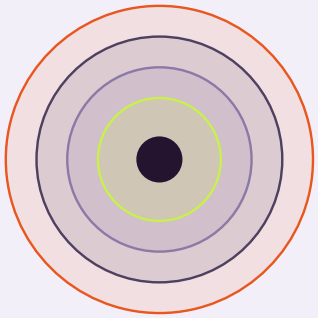
| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
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| | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



**The pain is real. The danger may not be. Teach the alarm the difference, one calm minute at a time.**

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER ALAN GORDON