

## The Terrifying Triad

When a basic human need such as air, food, or water is not met, we experience a deep feeling of anxiety. We then take directed action to meet the need, which allays our anxiety. When the ability to meet our basic needs is taken from us, our anxiety escalates to fear and ultimately anger. I pointed out in the post, “Your Hand over the Stove,” that if you were forced to hold your hand over the hot burner of a stove, you would first experience extreme anxiety, which would be followed by anger. When you are experiencing chronic pain, you cannot “get your hand away from the stove.”

In addition to chronic pain, anxiety and frustration are pounding away at your nervous system. Pain is never a happy experience, so the anger and anxiety circuits are really hammered. There is a single general area of the brain that causes you to feel anxious and frustrated, which means that there is an intersection of pain, anxiety, and anger.

Additionally, we have other sources of anxiety and frustration. Pain sets off anxiety and anger, but other stresses are connected to the pain pathways as well. When you are under a lot of stress and experience more pain, it is NOT imaginary pain or “psychological” pain. These pathways are now just linked together. It has been demonstrated on functional MRI’s that the corresponding pain areas in your brain are active. Your brain is “on fire.”

As I work with my patients that have been working with the DOCC protocol for a while, they become quite aware of this linkage. It is very clear that when other stresses rise past a certain point, there is a corresponding increase in their pain. It is unfortunate that the severity of the pain can be so severe that I frequently feel compelled to reorder expensive diagnostic tests, which rarely reveal anything of significance.

One final thought about the intersection of these pathways. Even when I can surgically remove the source of pain, I think there is a permanent elevation of the intensity of these anxiety and frustration circuits. There is no reason they should dissipate, as there are so many other reasons for these pathways to remain stimulated. I feel that chronic pain is such a terrible experience, the elevation of anxiety and anger is often extreme. Calming these pathways requires specific strategies that are outlined throughout this web site. There are no shortcuts. The consequences of not pursuing a solution is extreme; conversely, the rewards for doing so are spectacular.

—Dr. David Hanscom