



TITLE OF THE BOOK

YOUR PAIN PLAYBOOK. Effective daily strategies for life beyond pain

AUTHOR

Helen Roome

INFORMATION ON THE BOOK

Published: 2023

Publisher: Self-published.

ISBN number: 978-0-6397-7326-1

Available in paperback. Cost: ZAR 350.00 (excluding delivery fees).

The book can be ordered from www.helenroome.co.za or info@helenroome.co.za

Available as an eBook: Cost ZAR 323.66 and is available on all Amazon platforms at:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CB8YXPZY/ref=mp_s_a_1_1_crid=1QAPAHAWNLI0H&keywords=your+pain+playbook+helen+roome&qid=1688742923&prefix=your+pain+playbook+helen+roome%2Caps%2C345&sr=8-1

Number of pages: 250 pages

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Van Biljon HM. A review of the book *YOUR PAIN PLAYBOOK* written by Helen Roome. South African Journal of Occupational Therapy. Vol 54 No1, 2024.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2024/vol54n1a12>

INFORMATION ON THE REVIEWER

Hester M van Biljon

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4433-6457>

Affiliations: Private Practitioner at Work-Link Vocational Rehabilitation Practice, Johannesburg, South Africa

Contact details: HesterMvanBiljon@gmail.com

Declaration of bias: The reviewer has no bias to declare. The Large Language Model (LLM), ChatGPT, was used to edit the language and grammar of the review.

DATES

Submitted: November 2023

Reviewed: Not peer reviewed

Accepted: December 2023

Published under an International Creative Commons License 4.0

A review of the book **YOUR PAIN PLAYBOOK** written by Helen Roome

Information on the author

Helen Roome, BSc OT (Wits), PG Dip. Int. Pain Mgt, Prac. Dip Labour Law, MA (VP) (Prac.Theology), is a South African occupational therapist with many years of experience working in the field of complex pain management. Her occupational therapy practice focuses on offering therapy and support to adults (18+ years) who need to manage the daily challenges of chronic pain and/or fatigue. Her special interest is Fibromyalgia/chronic widespread pain, ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), chronic low back pain, chronic primary pain, Long-COVID/post-COVID syndrome, chronic pelvic pain, chronic headaches and painful arthritic conditions (like Osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis and Lupus/SLE). She is the chairperson of the Occupational Therapy Pain Management Group of South Africa.

THE REVIEW

The book is a practical guide for persons living with persistent pain, aiming to help them understand and manage their pain while living more functional lives. The author notes: this book is *meant to compliment, not replace, sound medical advice from qualified (and pain informed!) healthcare practitioners* (page 1). In a practical, creative, and enjoyable manner, the book is a product of the author's 25 years of clinical occupational therapy practice, knowledge, and experience in pain management. The guide is structured into six weeks, each consisting of seven days, referred to as a 'section'. Each day of the 'section' comprises information, captivating vignettes or stories to illustrate concepts, reflective prompts, practical activities or tasks, and concludes with a key take-home message. The book can be completed either in groups or individually.

With the exception of the first week, which serves as an introduction and background, the other weeks need not be followed chronologically. The subject matter for each week is:

Week 1: Understanding my pain. Explaining the reason for pain, the author compares the human pain system to the Go-away bird (the Grey Turaco). *"Our pain system perceives and protects us from physical threats (such as physical injuries, illness or infections) or psychological threats (like traumatic experience or chronic stress) or pervasive threats relating to our social and environmental context (such as racism, poverty or pollution)."* (page 15)

Week 2: Sleeping better. Addressing the complex and responsive relationship between pain and sleep, the author explains the science of sleep and pain. Practical actions such as getting enough sunshine during the day, being active and managing stress are suggested and explained. Organising a sleep routine and establishing a wind-down ritual are among the recommendations. The pros and cons of sleep medication are discussed, with advice such as: *"You can surrender to a sense of rest rather than fighting to fall asleep."* (page 75).

Week 3: Moving more. *"Although moving is the last thing you want to do when you have persistent pain, it is probably the best thing you can do!"* (page 83). The positive impact that physical activity and an active lifestyle can have on pain is explained. Encouraging a fun approach to exercise, starting at a low intensity and gradually increasing it (page 95), exercising with a partner, and practicing mindful movement (page 110) are some examples of sessions designed to help people with pain become more active.



Week 4: Managing stress. This section addresses physical, psychological and social stressors. It covers identifying the causes of stress, the dietary impact on stress, gardening, laughter, time management, setting boundaries, letting go and focusing on the future.

Week 5: Embracing rhythm and rest. "Pain can be replaced with purpose" (page 159). Setting goals and working smarter are discussed. Consulting an occupational therapist for vocational rehabilitation is explained and recommended. The section emphasizes working hard and with focus, while also allowing time for relaxation and resetting.

Week 6: Being fully present. The final session focuses on mindfulness. It offers simple mindfulness meditations, practices, and activities, as well as discussions on relaxation exercises and breathing techniques. Topics include sexuality, relationships with individuals and communities, journaling, social support, and spirituality.

Upon completing the six-week programme, participants can consider drawing up a daily routine and having a flare-up plan. The author is multi-talented and the text is full of stories and metaphors. She also ends the book with a prayer-poem (page 227) that she wrote during the pandemic, which to me was the highlight of the read:

Today, may you see the sun break
through and glint off green and golden things;
the new
the hidden
paths to pass through this storm.

Today, may you feel the warmth beam down
and steam the hope from soggy ground;
the scent
the promise
of better growing in this dark.

-Helen Roome, 2 April 2020

The book is evidence-based and client-directed. Using the critical reflective method¹ and combining it with everyday practical strategies in laymen's terms, it equips individuals with pain to take control of their lives and situations. It is also uniquely African with headings such as *Baboons and bedtime habits* (page 66), *About Hippos and sitting disease* (page 113), *Cheetahs and cutting your energy costs* (page 166), drawing analogies and comparisons from authentic African contexts.

Relevance to occupational therapy

Written for people living with pain, their families, friends, and caregivers, it is a highly valuable resource for occupational therapists working with adults in all fields of practice, whose occupational performance and profiles are affected by pain. The entertaining and easy-to-read style makes it much more than just a guide or a how-to book. I can envision students and especially community service occupational therapists finding it helpful, offering a refreshing departure from the textbooks and journals they typically rely on to gather evidence for their practice.

One aspect that doesn't sit well with me is the title of the book: "Your Pain Playbook." This feels like a contradiction in terms. I understand the author's intention to de-catastrophize pain, to convince individuals that their pain is something they can take ownership of instead of being a hostage to it. The author also chose the title as a pointer to emerging research on the necessity for 'play' amongst adults and as a contrast to work books that often feel like 'hard work' to get through and apply practically. However, in general, as an occupational therapist, I associate *play* with the field of paediatrics. Furthermore, the intended readership – individuals who have chronic pain – might perceive the word *play* as dismissive or trivializing of their experience. In the worst case, considering the book's potential global audience on the internet, the title might inadvertently attract interest related to self-harm, masochistic tendencies, or related matters.

Having read the book to review it, I promised myself that I was going to read it again purely for enjoyment. I was also left with an intense desire for similar resources in the fields of palliative care, substance abuse, dementia, and especially for parents raising children with severe disabilities. The researcher in me also insisted that I have to inform the occupational therapy academia that: "This is a randomized controlled trial begging to happen."

REFERENCES

1. Rolfe G, Jasper M, Freshwater D. Critical Reflection In Practice: Generating Knowledge for Care. 2nd Edition. London: RedGlobe; 2019. 225p.