

**Self-injury is the practice of deliberately harming the body without suicidal intent.**

People self-injure in many ways to varying degrees of severity. The practice is not exclusive to one gender or age group. The root of this struggle is primarily spiritual and emotional rather than physical.

## Common Characteristics

Self-injury can include cutting, intense scratching, burning, hitting, piercing, or pulling out hair for the purpose of harming the body. Reasons people self-injure include:

- **To Take Control:** When life is out of control, it can be comforting to exert control over something.
- **To Express Pain:** Self-injury can be used as a way to make emotional pain visible to others. People often hide injuries, yet hope that someone discovers them.
- **To Escape Reality:** Physical pain can be used as a distraction when real life is overwhelming.
- **To Feel Something:** Emotionally numb people can become desperate to experience any sensation, even if it's painful.
- **To Get a Natural "High":** The endorphin rush that occurs with self-harm can be addictive.
- **To Punish Oneself:** Self-harm may be an attempt to atone for things that cause guilt or shame—either things you have done or things that have been done to you.
- **To Protect Oneself:** Abuse victims may attempt to make their bodies less attractive as a defense against becoming a future target.

Regardless of why a person harms his or her body, *self-injury cannot fix the underlying problem*. And, like most addictions, unhealthy methods of coping with pain often become a source of pain. Secret habits lead to isolation and loneliness, perpetuating the cycle of hurt.

## Biblical Insights

**God loves you.** If you are trapped in pain or feel alone, know that God sees you. He has not forgotten or forsaken you. He is pursuing you, calling out for you to turn to him so that he can heal you.

- "...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory..." (Matthew 12:20)
- "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

**God understands and cares about your pain.** Christ suffered for sin to offer you eternal life now.

- "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" (Psalm 56:8)
- "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

**Only God is in control and He is good.** Any sense of control we experience is an illusion; control has always belonged to God, who works in all things with perfect knowledge and love.

- "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." (Proverbs 19:21)
- "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

### **Self-injury enslaves you. Your habit is not working for you; you are working for it.**

- *“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)*
- *“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.” (2 Peter 2:19)*

**Christ has already paid for your sin.** Thanks to the blood of Jesus—the only blood that saves—no one, not even you yourself, can condemn you. We are healed by Christ's wounds.

- *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:1, 33-34)*
- *“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)*

**Your body is precious.** God has entrusted you with a physical body that will someday be gloriously transformed. You are its steward, not its owner.

- *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*
- *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1)*

**Willpower won't heal you.** Anything short of complete spiritual transformation by the power of God in you is only behavior modification and is bound to fail.

- *“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:5)*
- *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)*

### **Next Steps**

- Ask Christ to heal you. (Romans 10:13)
- Identify and address the underlying need behind your self-injury. The next time you feel the urge to hurt yourself, slow down, pray and consider your motivation. Ask God for courage to address your pain and let others know your temptation. (Proverbs 14:8)
- Practice communicating. Find a place where you can talk without fear of judgment, like a re:generation recovery group. Commit to stepping out of secrecy. (1 John 1:7)
- Prepare for vulnerable situations well in advance. Identify your stressors that often lead you to harm yourself and decide how you will respond to them should temptation come. (1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:13)
- Do not despair when you mess up. God's grace and his love is unconditional. (Romans 8:1)
- Self-injury often goes hand in hand with depression. Read over the Depression Issue Sheet for more information.

God loves you, and there is hope and healing in Christ. If you have not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you can learn more at [www.regenerationrecovery.org/freedom](http://www.regenerationrecovery.org/freedom).

### **Additional Resources**

- For stories of hope, go to [www.regenerationrecovery.org](http://www.regenerationrecovery.org): Ginni
- Books: *Self-Injury: When Pain Feels Good* – Edward T. Welch, *Cutting: A Healing Response* – Jeremy Lelek, *Inside a Cutter's Mind: Understanding and Helping Those Who Self-Injure* - Jerusha Clark with Dr. Earl Henslin, *Scars That Wound: Scars That Heal* - Jan Kern