

Welcome to the Pain Management Programme



**During your time on the programme
contact us on 01324 614 347**

fv.psygroups@nhs.scot

**After the group has finished contact us
on 01324 673 679**

Welcome to the NHS Forth Valley pain management programme. We hope that you will find it useful. This programme involves:

- Group appointments weekly for 9 weeks.
- A group follow up appointment at 3 months.
- A group follow up appointment at 6 months.

If you are attending a morning group, it will run from 9.30-12.

If you are attending an afternoon group, it will run from 1.30-4.

The programme will be led jointly by a psychologist, a physiotherapist, and a nurse. Usually this will be the same members of staff each week. However, there may be times when a familiar staff member may not be able to take a group session, and when this happens another member of the team may be present. Wherever possible we will let you know about this change in advance.

This programme is more likely to be helpful if you can:

- Attend all the appointments.
- Practice the skills we discuss in between sessions.
- Think about how you can best apply what we discuss to your own life.
- Talk to us about any difficulties that come up as you try this.

It can be challenging to come along to your first group appointment. Many people tell us that they feel anxious about meeting others and worried about what they may be asked to do. Usually, these unpleasant feelings get easier quite quickly. Often people tell us they feel much better at the end of the first session than the beginning. It may also help to know:

- It is likely that your feelings are shared by others in the room.
- We aim to make the sessions informal and friendly.
- You will not be quizzed or tested at any point.
- There will be regular breaks.
- Regular movement is encouraged during the appointment.
- Consider bringing with you anything that will help you to be as comfortable as possible.

There are some 'rules' that are important to mention:

- The appointments are confidential. Please do not talk about anyone in the group, outside the group. This does not mean that you cannot share the content of the sessions with others in your life; in fact, this can be very helpful.
- Pain management sessions are for you alone. Please do not bring a companion as we do not have the space.
- Please communicate respectfully. That usually means allowing other viewpoints, using a calm tone of voice, trying to avoid talking over others and balancing talking with listening.
- If there is anything else that is important to you, please let us know.

Contents

We have organised the content of this workbook in the order that we hope to cover in the group. At times this order may change, or we may spend longer on some topics than others depending on the needs of each group we work with.

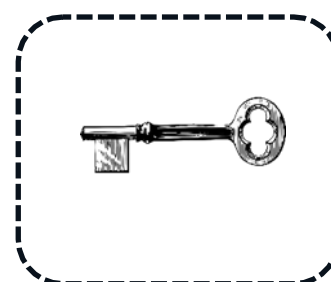
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Using this workbook

This workbook aims to:

- Give you a reminder about what we have covered each week.
- Help you to relax about missing bits or struggling to focus on '*everything*' we discuss.
- Offer you something to keep and use in the future after the programme has finished.
- Include exercises that encourage you to apply what we discuss to your own life.
- Add links for you to read more about a topic if you chose.
- Share the key points of each topic.

If the information shared on this programme feels overwhelming, it is ok not to read through this workbook in full. It may help to look for this symbol to catch the key messages.



How can pain management help?

We often find it helpful to explain what the purpose of this programme is by using a boat metaphor.

Having a long-term condition like chronic pain can often feel like being stuck on a sailboat alone during a storm that never ends. When you are the only person on your boat, and you can see lots of water coming in, it is very understandable and natural for your “survival” mode to be activated, and your attention to shift **completely** to bailing the water. In the short-term giving this all our attention can feel like a helpful way to deal with the storm. However, if the storm never stops, there will always be water coming into your boat. If you use all your energy and resources in bailing the water out, **who will then sail the boat?**

Spend a minute thinking about this. What will happen to a boat stuck in a storm with no-one to sail it?

The answer often is **it becomes adrift and loses its direction.**



In the same way, if we spend all our energy and effort trying to get rid of chronic pain, we might lose direction in life and become out of touch with what gives us meaning or joy. It is important to remember that although there is water in your boat, the boat is still afloat and by continuing to sail in the direction that you want it to go in and spending less time bailing the water, can help the boat to better navigate the rough sea. This is the aim of this course to help you to move forwards and to live a more meaningful life with pain.



Key Points:

- ▶ Having chronic pain can feel like your boat is stuck in the middle of the sea during a storm that never ends.
- ▶ Unfortunately, there is no way of making pain disappear completely.
- ▶ Giving all our energy to trying to achieve this can impact the quality and direction of your life.
- ▶ Unfortunately, there's no way of making the pain disappear completely, and giving all our energy trying to achieve this can impact the quality and direction of our life.
- ▶ This programme is designed to help you learn ways to manage your pain.
- ▶ It will also support you to re-engage with what really matters to you so you can live a more meaningful and valued life despite pain levels.

Making sense of pain

Chronic pain is:

- Pain that has been there for more than 3 months.
- A recognised long- term condition
- Different to short lived or acute pain
- A condition that can have a big effect on general health, activity and wellbeing

Chronic pain affects about one in five people in Scotland. Pain management can be helpful when pain, and the distress caused by pain, has a big effect on quality of life.

Our protective pain system

Many people find it helpful to understand more about how their pain works because:

- It is important to know you have something real, that the way you feel can be explained
- Understanding more about something can make it less scary
- Understanding pain can help you to find out more about what could help
- You can choose to share this information with others which may help them to understand more about your health



Key points: Understanding pain can be helpful

Why do humans feel pain?

As humans, we feel pain to protect us and keep us alive. When we feel pain it makes us pay attention, often this is useful, as we can then take action to help ourselves. But pain is not always useful. Our pain system can be overprotective. When pain becomes a constant or daily problem it stops being a useful warning and becomes threatening to our wellbeing.

How do humans feel pain?

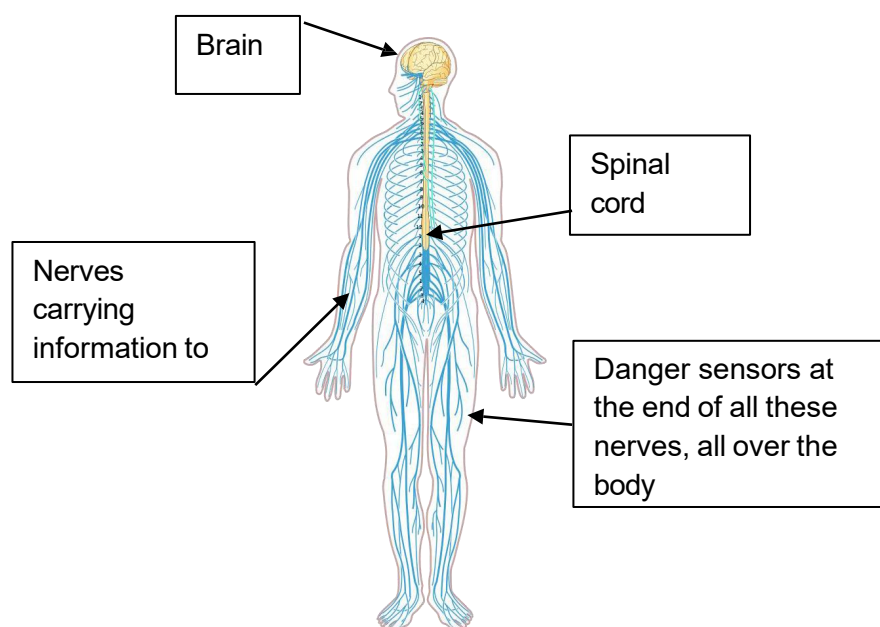
Pain is produced by our pain system, part of our nervous system. The pain system has several parts to it that work together to produce pain.

Nerves carry information in the form of electrical signals. At the end of these nerves there are sensors, we can call them danger sensors. A bit like the sensors in an alarm system these danger sensors do nothing at all until they notice something nearby that does not feel right. The danger sensors in our pain system respond to changes in:

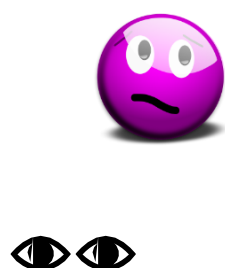
- temperature- for example your hand is getting too close to the fire
- pressure- for example you are sitting on something hard or spiky

- chemistry- for example your tooth is inflamed because of an infection

When a danger sensor notices a change, electrical messages are sent up nerves that pass into the spinal cord, a highway of nerves inside your spinal column. These messages travel up the spinal cord to your brain. It is important to understand that these messages are not pain; they are just information at this stage about what is going on in your body at that moment.



Our brain is a supercomputer with the job of keeping us alive. When information coming in from danger sensors reaches the brain, the brain tries to make sense of this information. To do this it puts it together with everything else it knows about you including memories, past experiences, general health, infections, mood, emotions, temperature, stress, worries or concerns, sleep, rest, energy, activity level, what you can see and hear around you and everything else.



Key points: Pain is produced by the brain when it puts together information from your body with lots of other information about you



Research has shown that there are hundreds of parts of the brain involved in making sense of the information arriving in the brain from the pain system. In very, very quick time the brain decides how dangerous this new information is. If the conclusion is that there is danger, or could be danger, then the brain will send messages to that part of the body and the sensation of pain will be felt.

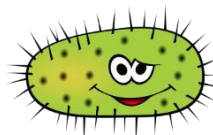


Key points:

- ▶ **When we talk about the brain what we DO NOT mean is that pain is imaginary. Pain is always real.**
- ▶ **Pain ≠ damage**



We cannot say that the pain we feel will match the amount of harm in our body.
There are so many factors that can make a difference.



Take a moment to think about your own experiences with pain.

Write down a time when you felt no pain even though you had an injury?

You may have seen a bruise on your body without remembering how it happened or had an injury during sport that doesn't hurt at the time.

Write down a time when you felt pain, but you know there was nothing dangerous wrong with your body?

Examples may include a severe headache when you get dehydrated or muscle cramp after too much walking.

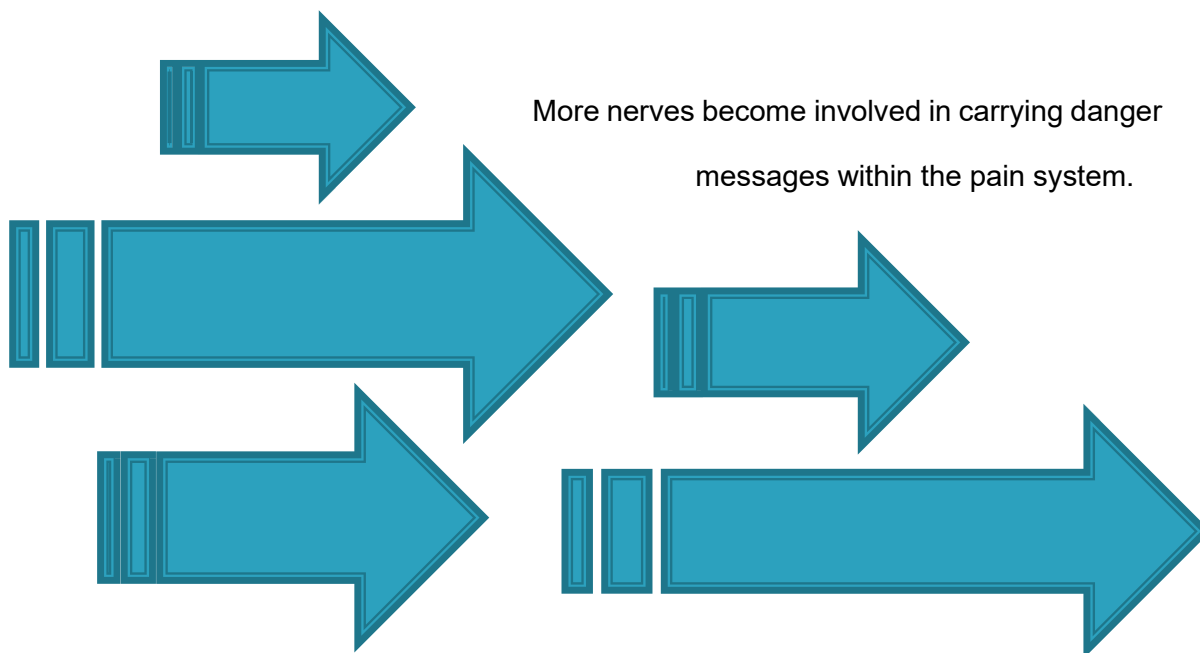
Pain system wind up

Wind up is one way of describing how the pain system becomes more sensitive. Wind up is a normal process that should be temporary, there when we need more protection but winding down again when things settle. In wind up the following changes happen inside the pain system:



Danger sensors at the end of nerve endings change so they are more sensitive to anything happening in the body.

Nerves within the pain system work faster.



In chronic pain the pain system becomes wound up to a more sensitive setting and stays that way. There is still likely to be wind up and wind down, but the system may not wind down completely, like an alarm system constantly switched on.



Key points: Chronic pain happens when our protective pain system becomes overprotective.

How do we know that the pain system is wound up?

The following symptoms help us to know when the pain system is wound up. They can help to diagnose chronic pain based on real signs and symptoms. Think about the following symptoms and tick those that apply to you.

- Constant pain.
- Pain that moves to different parts of your body.
- Pain in many parts of your body and sometimes your whole body.
- Pain that changes in ways that do not always make sense.
- An increase in sensitivity to some or all the following: touch, movement, pressure, temperature, sound, and light.
- An increase in pain at the same time as feeling touch, pressure, movement, or temperature change.
- Scan results that do not match the way you feel for example a normal scan when you are in a lot of pain, or a scan that is no worse than the last one even though you know your pain has worsened.

Write down the other symptoms you get along with pain. Underline those that would fit with a pain system in wind up?



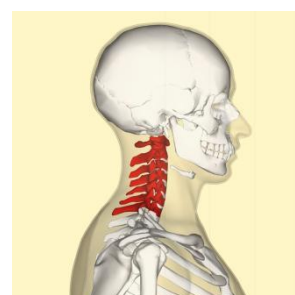
Key points: Pain can be wound up or wound down within the nervous system

What have you been told is causing your pain?

If you have seen health care professionals about your pain, and maybe had scans and investigations, it is likely that the pain will have been explained to you in terms of something having gone wrong inside your body.

Those explanations may have mentioned muscles, nerves, discs, joints, scarring, inflammation, arthritis.

This information may be correct, but it does not give us the full story.



How much pain we feel from any changes inside our body, and if that pain settles or becomes chronic, ALWAYS depends on how protective your pain system is at that time.

Change is possible.

Our nervous system constantly changes in response to what we do. We call this change plasticity. In the same way that the pain system can change and wind up, become more protective, it can also change and wind down, become less protective.

Think about your own pain and how it behaves. Is it the same all the time or are there changes, however small, for the better or worse as you go through each day? These changes are wind up, and wind down in action.

What winds up your pain?

What winds down your pain?



Key points:

- ▶ **Everything matters when it comes to pain, many things can make a difference**
- ▶ **We can influence our pain experience and make changes in our nervous system, there is no one solution**

The importance of being present and switching off autopilot

Finding the direction we want to take is a good first step. What follows, is switching off the autopilot/survival mode we spoke of during the boat metaphor and try to make more intentional decisions that will bring you closer to what's most meaningful to you.

We'd like to show what we mean by "autopilot". Consider the following points for a bit:

Have you ever...

...driven home from work, parked, and wondered how you got there?

...walked in a room in your home and could not recall the reason you went into that room to begin with?

...saw a bruise that you didn't even remember what injury caused it?

Whether you answered yes or no to all, you might wonder why most people have this experience.

Why are most of us living on "autopilot"?

Did you know that every human experiences on average 60,000 thoughts per day? That means, we experience about 41 thoughts per minute. If we could sketch the brain of a human, it would look something like this picture.....



When our brain is full of thoughts and we become consumed by them, it is much harder to find the brain capacity to focus on our experiences or steer our attention towards what is important in the moment. This might mean we miss important signals our body sends, being present when spending time with friends and family, or opportunities to act in line with our values (e.g. have you ever sent an email or text that you regretted afterwards?).

Why does the brain give us so many thoughts per day?

Our brain is a problem-solving machine that has the very important job of helping us survive. Let me repeat this again: **The job of our brain since the beginning of time has been to help us survive, NOT to make us happy.**

To be able to do that, the brain constantly thinks about what could happen to us or what has happened to us to try find the best solutions. I.e. it always looks for problems to be able to solve them! This is an **unavoidable and automatic** function of our brain!

When we get caught up with thoughts it can be like "getting stuck only focusing on bailing water out of our boat". It does not mean you are doing something wrong, in fact it's a sign

that your brain is working the way it was intended to. The issue can be when these thoughts consume so much of our time and energy, that they prevent us from engaging with the things that are meaningful to us.

So, what we can do differently?

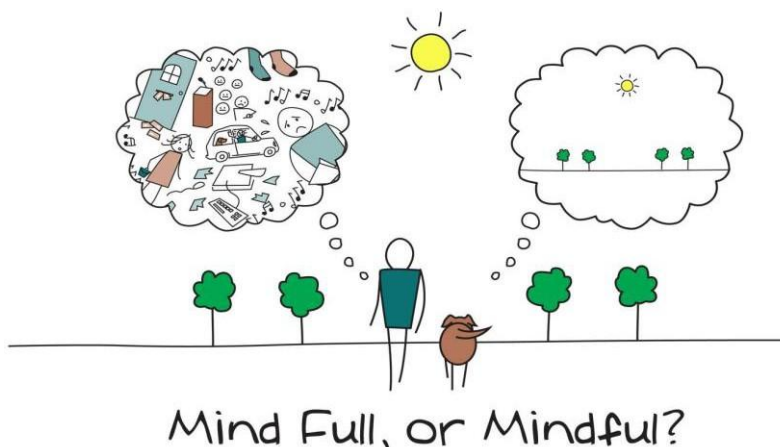
The answer to this is practice being **Mindful**.

Mindfulness is simply the practice of being present and aware of your experience. In other words, it is the skill of recognising when you are distracted by your thoughts and returning your attention to what you are doing and feeling at this moment in time. This is incredibly difficult to do because it goes against our brain's survival mode. For that reason, when you first begin to practice being mindful you might find it very frustrating, difficult, and/or hard to tolerate. Mindfulness is not a relaxation exercise although this can be an outcome, and it does not have to be limited to meditation only.

Throughout this programme you will be introduced to a series of mindfulness techniques. You can find these in Appendix 1. It is important to practice them daily or as much as we can outside this group for you to notice the benefits.

Tips on how to start:

- Start practicing the exercise we introduced in this week for 5mins each day. If 5 minutes are too difficult to tolerate, adjust to 3 minutes, or even 1 minute.
- It's better to practice these exercises when you feel that you have some mental space and are not highly distressed. Learning anything new would be difficult if we did it at the most difficult time.
- Although this can be relaxing the purpose is to be able to notice what our mind is doing and so it may be better not to practice when you are feeling particularly tired or sleepy.
- There is no wrong way to practice mindfulness. Your attention will shift to the way you feel, what you think, sounds etc. This is normal. Show kindness to yourself if you struggle to keep your attention to one thing. Simply notice it, and re-direct your attention back to the exercise.





Key points:

- ▶ **Our brain is a problem-solving machine that constantly tries to evaluate how it can keep us safe. For that reason, it tends to focus on what might be going wrong in our life.**
- ▶ **Thoughts are all the scenarios the brain can come up with. This does not mean that our thoughts will come true. Thoughts are not FACTS.**
- ▶ **We have on average 60,000 thoughts per day.**
- ▶ **We all tend to focus on what thoughts we have without meaning to and this means we are less present in what is happening to us now. This can impact how we feel and how we experience our reality.**
- ▶ **Mindfulness is the skill of recognising when we get caught up in our thoughts and redirect our attention to whatever it is we are doing in the here and now.**
- ▶ **Mindfulness can be practiced in many ways and there is no wrong way of practicing being present.**

Can you write down any examples of times it might have been helpful for you to be more mindful of what you were doing or feeling in the moment (instead of being too caught up in your thoughts)?

Finding Our Direction Again

Living with a long-term condition can mean losing touch with what is important to you. Pain may have stopped you from taking part in activities in the way you used to, and this can be understandably distressing. If you find yourselves feeling frustrated or distressed because you are unable to do something, it is likely that this activity was bringing you closer to something that's meaningful to you – an important value for your life.

Values are what you care about deep down and they can be different for everyone and change over time. They reflect who you want to be and what you want to stand for. For that reason, there will be more than one activity or action that could bring you closer to that value. For example, pain may have stopped you from showing you care about a loved one in the way you used to, but does that mean that there are no other ways to show you care?

One way of thinking about values is that they are like compass directions that we want to move our sailboat towards. The value is not the place you get to, instead it guides the direction of your journey. Let's say that 'North' represents a value that was important to you. You can never *reach* North, but it is the direction you are headed in.

Let's imagine an example.

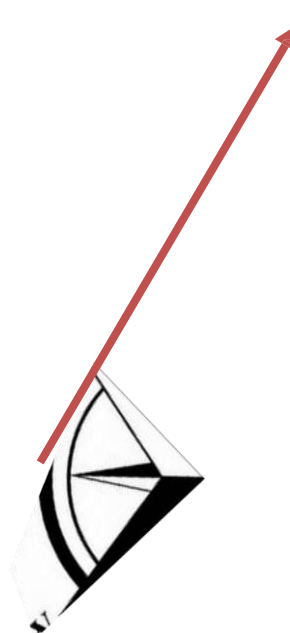
Nora is a 35-year-old single woman who has had pain for over 5 years and values 'being a caring person'. She used to show her care by doing practical things for her friends and family (e.g. did her mother's weekly shopping and babysat her friends' children). Her pain means that she's no longer able to do those tasks and she wondered how else she might continue to live according to that value. This is what she came up with:

Actions that move her towards being a caring person

- Texting a friend to check in and see how they are doing
- Spending time with mother and giving her all of my attention
- Putting less pressure on myself and practicing more self-care

Actions that move her away from being a caring person

- Not responding to messages from family and friends
- Criticising myself for not being good enough
- Avoiding spending any time with mother because I feel guilt for not doing the weekly shopping anymore





Key points:

- ▶ Sometimes we focus more on what we do rather than why we do it. When you have chronic pain, it is likely that you are no longer able to do everything you used to and this can be very hard. However, if we figure out why we'd like to do a specific thing, then we might be able to come up with other ways to express what is meaningful to us.
- ▶ The why we choose to do something usually lies in our values.
- ▶ Values are qualities we'd like our behaviours to have and help guide our decisions.

What are your values?

Think about what direction **you** want to take. The exercises below are designed to help you think about your values. Try to complete at least one.

Exercise A:

Let yourself dream and consider all the things that are of value to you. Find below a list of values often reported to us. You may think some of these values are important, and others that don't matter so much to you. Don't worry too much about whether they are possible; let yourself connect with what your heart really desires. There are no 'right' answers. It's what matters to **you**!

Read through the list below and if you want, you can **write a letter next to each value: V = Very important, Q = Quite important, and N = Not so important.**

1. **Adventure:** to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
2. **Acceptance:** to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc.
3. **Assertiveness:** to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. **Authenticity:** to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself
5. **Beauty:** to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc
6. **Caring:** to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc
7. **Challenge:** to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. **Compassion:** to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. **Connection:** to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. **Contribution:** to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others

11. **Conformity:** to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. **Cooperation:** to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. **Courage:** to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. **Creativity:** to be creative or innovative
15. **Curiosity:** to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. **Encouragement:** to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. **Equality:** to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. **Excitement:** to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
19. **Fairness:** to be fair to myself or others
20. **Fitness:** to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my health and wellbeing
21. **Flexibility:** to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. **Freedom:** to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. **Friendliness:** to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. **Forgiveness:** to be forgiving towards myself or others
25. **Fun:** to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. **Generosity:** to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. **Gratitude:** to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. **Honesty:** to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. **Humour:** to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. **Humility:** to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves
31. **Industry:** to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
32. **Independence:** to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. **Intimacy:** to open up, emotionally or physically, in my close personal relationships
34. **Justice:** to uphold justice and fairness
35. **Kindness:** to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. **Love:** to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others

- 37. **Mindfulness:** to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience
- 38. **Order:** to be orderly and organised
- 39. **Open-mindedness:** to see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
- 40. **Patience:** to wait calmly for what I want
- 41. **Persistence:** to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
- 42. **Pleasure:** to create and give pleasure to myself or others
- 43. **Power:** to influence others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organising
- 44. **Reciprocity:** to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking?
- 45. **Respect:** to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite and considerate
- 46. **Responsibility:** to be responsible and accountable for my actions
- 47. **Romance:** to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
- 48. **Safety:** to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others
- 49. **Self-awareness:** to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
- 50. **Self-care:** to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
- 51. **Self-development:** to keep improving knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.
- 52. **Self-control:** to act in accordance with my own ideals
- 53. **Sensuality:** to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
- 54. **Sexuality:** to explore or express my sexuality
- 55. **Spirituality:** to connect with things bigger than myself
- 56. **Skilfulness:** to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
- 57. **Supportiveness:** to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
- 58. **Trust:** to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable

Write down any other values you hold that are not listed above.....

Exercise B:

For this exercise we would like you to use your imagination as a way of connecting with your values and direction. It is important to take a bit of time to think about this to be able to access what is really important to you so don't feel that you need to rush to write something down.

Think about a time in the future when a party is being held in your honour for your 90th Birthday. At this event, people who are important to you, and who care about you, have come together to celebrate you and your life. This is an imaginary event so you can envisage that anyone who has ever been important in your life is in attendance, even if you know in reality that this would not be possible.



Guests step forward to make speeches about you and spend time talking about the type of person you are. Imagine that you have become the person that you would most like to be. Think about what you would most want each person to say about you and write down each description. Remember that you don't need to show this to anyone so allow yourself to be open about the things you would most like each person to say.

Person 1: What do they say?



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Person 2: What do they say?



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Person 3: What do they say?



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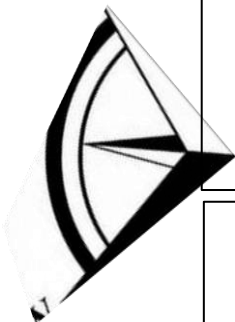
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Exercise C:

People will have different ideas about what each value means and how important each value is to them. We are all different! For each of these life areas, write a line or a few words about how you want to live. Rate each domain for how important it is to you (0 = not important; 10 = most important)

Example: Health 7/10 “to care for my body and treat myself with kindness”.

Work/Occupation /10 	Family life /10 	Friendships /10
Religion/Spirituality /10 		Marriage/intimate relationship /10
Community /10 		Health /10
Hobbies/Interests /10 		Personal Growth /10

Moving with confidence

How does movement feel for you? Notice what comes into your mind when starting to think about movement or exercise.



Exercise is good for us! We all know this to be true. In fact, moving more regularly is a powerful medicine that has been shown to improve brain health, reduce inflammation, reduce chronic disease, and lengthen life. But it can also be hard to access these benefits when pain is part of your daily experience. If you can, think about your own reasons to be active. Does movement matter to you? And if so, why?

Make a note here of **your own** reasons to be more active or to remain active.

Chronic pain can make movement more difficult. As pain becomes chronic the nervous system changes, it winds up in several ways, all of which can make movement more likely to hurt.

- Nerve endings react more easily.
- Messages pass more quickly through the pain system.
- More nerve pathways 'wake up' increasing the strength of the messages.



When the system winds up it becomes much less helpful. It is a bit like having an alarm system, but one that is going off all the time instead of just when needed. This sensitive alarm then goes off more loudly with normal daily activities. In this way movements that are safe, and even helpful, can become painful.



Key points: Movement is safe, despite pain, move gently and start small

There are other reasons why moving can be hard when it comes to chronic pain. Learning can play a part.

How we learn

If we do something often, we get better at it.

If something happens often, we get better at responding to it.

This works for choices that we make e.g. learning a new skill, and also for experiences that we don't choose e.g. regularly feeling pain. If pain is a regular part of our experience our nervous system gets better at producing it. Pathways carrying information within the pain system become quicker and more efficient. We could think of this a little like a well-worn path through a field of long grass. The more that pathway is used, the more likely that it will be used again.



This means movement that has increased pain in the past is likely to increase pain in the future, **without those movements being dangerous or harmful to the body**. This process of learning can make activity and movement harder. This is particularly true if pain has led to avoiding certain movements or positions.

The only way to change this is to take a different path. Starting to practice the movement that was once avoided, gently and slowly, teaches the nervous system that this movement is actually safe and ok.



Key points: Practicing manageable movement regularly. Teaches your nervous system that it is safe and ok

Do you avoid some movements regularly? Perhaps because they have been painful in the past?

Make a note here about what you have noticed ...

But I find exercise helpful already'

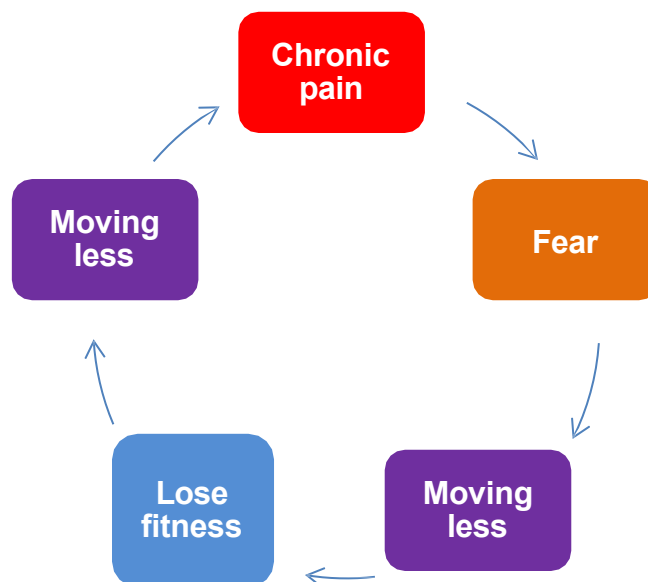
This is good news and doesn't mean that your pain system has not sensitised in the way we have explained. For some, a steady and gentle approach to exercise has come naturally. This may mean that unhelpful pathways connecting movement and pain have not developed and that your body has not de conditioned in the way it might have. If this is you, keep up the good work. If you want to, look at our section on building up to help you to progress.



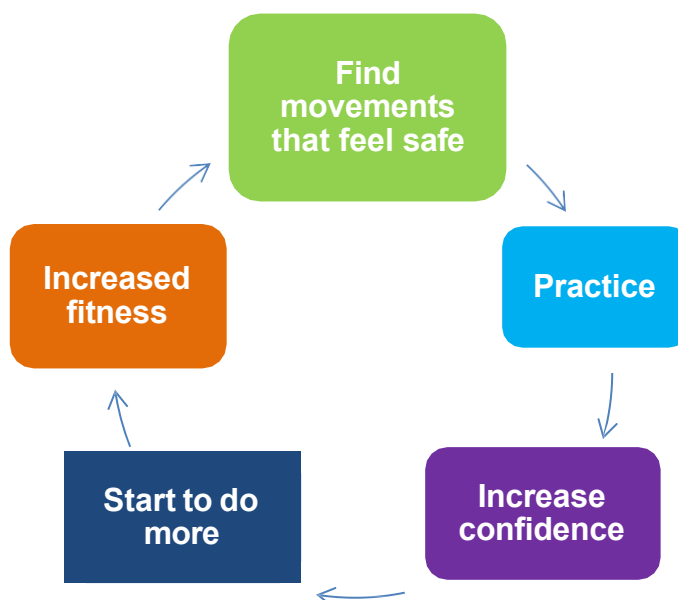
Key points: Increased sensitivity, stronger pain pathways and de conditioning of the body combine to mean movement and activity can be more difficult when you have chronic pain.

Overcoming de-conditioning

We all understand that moving less changes our body and the ability of our body to function well. Have a look at the chart below to see how easy it can be for a vicious circle to start, that makes it harder and harder to move with confidence.



You can make a difference to a downwards spiral with movement. To increase confidence, start at the top of this, more helpful, spiral.





Finding movements that feel safe

Any form of exercise that you enjoy, and where pain stays at a manageable level, can be of benefit to you. There is no right, best or perfect exercise.

Movement and daily activity that is part of life also counts. Think about what you do daily, how much time you spend moving around. Little and often still counts. Consider using a step counter to notice how much you already do.

Look at the table below for some ideas. These are suggestions to consider, there are no rules and whatever works for you is good for you

<p>If your activity level is low and movement is very hard</p> 	<p>Set a timer to stand up more often. Try some seated exercises. Try a home walking plan. Try a short walk outside. Add more hobbies that involve some movement. Join a gentle exercise class. Consider following an online exercise video</p>
<p>If you are busy and, on the go a lot, and struggle to find time to stop</p> 	<p>Try a few minutes of body awareness movement. Try a short Tai Chi video. Consider Yoga or Pilates that you can do at home. Find some stretches that you can fit in around other tasks. Could you add a walk in by parking further away or getting off the bus a little earlier.</p>



Key points:

- ▶ When choosing what exercise to try, think about what will move you closer to a balance.
- ▶ The best form of exercise for you is the one that you can keep going with.

You are in charge

Once you have settled on what exercises to try, you may need to adjust them to suit you.

Remember you do not need to find **pain free** exercise. Instead, you are looking for a **manageable** exercise, when pain settles down within a short while after you stop, back to the level it was at before you started.

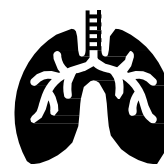
You can adjust your exercise in many ways:

- Move more slowly
- Make the movement a little smaller

- Do the exercise for a shorter time
- Take some pauses or rest breaks
- Change the position of your body e.g. sit down or lean on a support

If these adjustments don't help, try a different exercise, they all count.

Don't forget to breathe



It is very easy to hold our breath, without noticing, when we are trying hard with something. Because exercise often takes effort this may happen during your practice. Holding our breath is unhelpful as it means the body cannot get the oxygen it needs, but it also increases the level of stress chemicals in the blood stream which is not good for pain.

Check in with your breathing regularly as you exercise. If you notice you are holding your breath, just let it go. The aim is to breathe as evenly and steadily as possible. You do not need to take deep breaths or try to change breathing during exercise.

You may notice yourself breathing faster during activity. This normal, healthy and helpful. However, if you find yourself gasping or struggling to catch your breath, you could be pushing yourself too hard. A good guide is the ability to speak. If you can still comfortably talk you have got the effort level about right.



Key points: Have the confidence to make changes to the way you exercise to help them to feel right for you.

Useful links

Please find below some links to videos that may support your efforts to increase movement and activity at home. You can access these resources from the online version of your workbook.

Body awareness

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/improving-health-and-fitness/basic-body-awareness-therapy/>

Gentle Tai Chi

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/improving-health-and-fitness/tai-chi/tai-chi-shibashi-qigong/>

<https://services.nhslothian.scot/lcps/exercise-videos-pmp/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbGvYXB08uk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFAqqCTStLM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FRrDq04MV0&t=10s>

Gentle Yoga

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/improving-health-and-fitness/yoga/yoga-for-everyday/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEEhg-ATLYI>

Other body conditioning exercises for chronic pain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2DJ6hHtIYs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wu21JYDgqtQ&t=151s>

<https://services.nhslothian.scot/lcps/exercise-videos-pmp/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN8DV58eLgM&t=201s>

Avoidance of discomfort

It can be often difficult for us to be mindful. Many of us try to distract ourselves from or avoid any uncomfortable sensation, regardless of whether that's physical or emotional. This is something all humans tend to do – run away from what we consider bad and go towards what feels good. This can be helpful to us in the context of actual, life-threatening danger, for example running away from a dangerous animal. However, it can be problematic when we apply it in other areas of life.

Let us elaborate. Think of something you achieved in the past that you are really proud of & write it here:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Now try to remember how you felt before you achieved this, when you were just starting to work towards this goal. Write those emotions here:

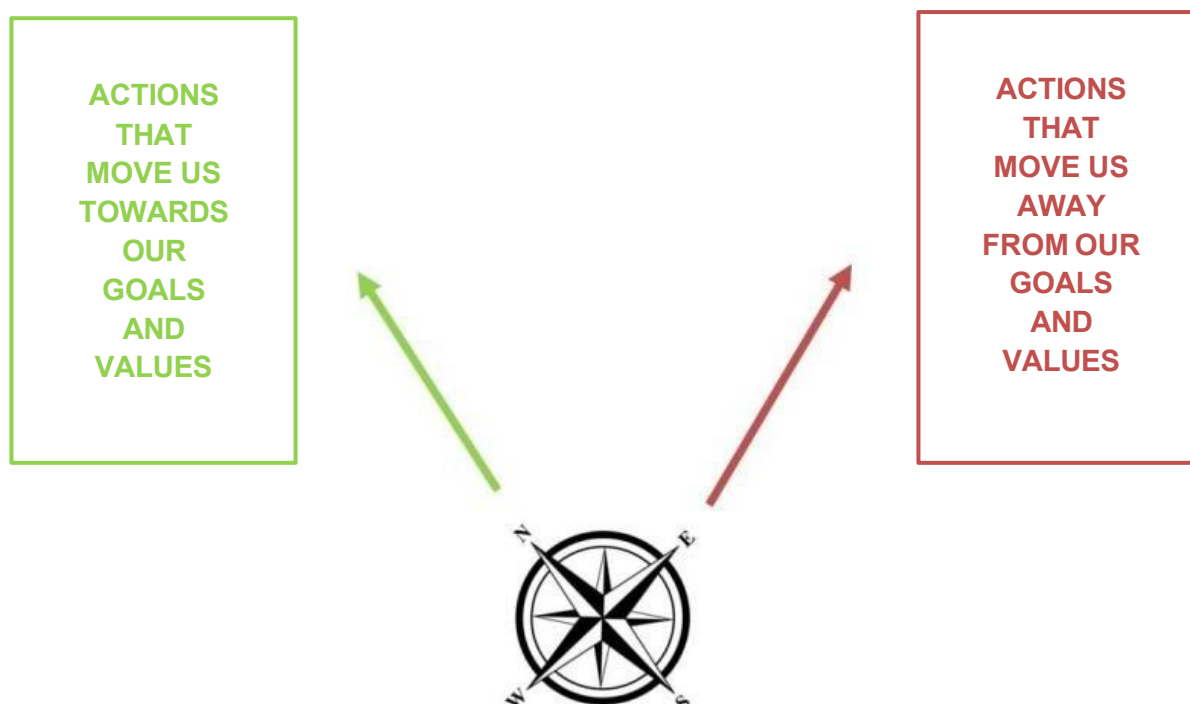
.....

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.....

If the emotions you identified above are anxiety, worry, fear, or something similar, let me ask you this: If you'd tried to avoid those feelings, would that lead to actions that **would have brought you closer to your goal**, or actions that would **move you further away from it**?



What we hope that exercise illustrated is that when we try to move forwards with something, especially things that are meaningful to us, we will likely naturally experience discomfort. This can include emotions, thoughts, or physical sensations we don't like having. If something matters to us, we might worry about how it will go, maybe tell ourselves "I can't do this!" or "this will go badly!". We might also experience physical symptoms of stress and imagine the pain we might feel going forward with our plans. Our natural human reaction is to try to avoid this discomfort. However, this can come at a great cost, as this avoidance could hold us back from living our lives the way we want.

As you can probably see, these two human instincts to move towards what we want, and at the same time away from what we don't, can often result in mental conflict and struggle. As well as potentially holding us back, this struggle itself can come with others costs too. It can cause mental discomfort and increase our stress as we wrestle with ourselves about what to do. This is similar to trying to fight your way out of quicksand:



When people get stuck in quicksand and start realising that they are sinking into the ground, their **natural reaction** is to try to dig themselves out by moving too fast. However, this is a trap, and more struggling will only make you sink deeper in the sand!!! The more helpful approach is **to go against your survival instincts**, and try to "drop the struggle", and stay still.

Another helpful way of seeing what avoiding discomfort does to us is by thinking of discomfort as someone with the same strength as us who we play tug of war with. It is natural when we feel discomfort to struggle with it and pull back.

If we stay stuck in this tug of war, what is the cost to us?

What if we try instead to just drop the rope? The discomfort won't go anywhere. It will still be right in front of us, staring right at us, but at least this way you choose to not spend any more energy or time on it.

Is there anything you have wanted to do for a while but have been avoiding it because of how this might impact your pain levels or your anxiety? If yes, what is it?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why is this action important to you? Which value of yours hides underneath?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What would be more helpful to you long-term?

.....

.....

.....

.....



Key points: Avoiding discomfort whether that's emotional (e.g. anxiety), or physical (e.g. pain) can make us feel better in the moment, but it also might prolong our difficulties longer term.

Managing activity

Chronic pain often brings challenges with activity. As the pain system winds up it becomes overprotective. This means pain increases much sooner after starting an activity without that activity being any more harmful than it was before.



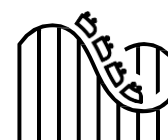
We have a choice how we cope with this change. Although it may not feel like a choice, but more like surviving or finding any way to keep going. It can be helpful to pause and think about whether how you cope with activity is working for you.

One way of coping is to reduce how active you are. This can feel safe and protective but, over time, you can lose strength and fitness and feel like you are missing out on activity that brings quality to your life.



Another way of coping is to push through with activity, to find a way of ignoring the pain for long enough to get something done. This can happen when jobs build up or when you feel you 'should' or 'must' keep going. Often this level of activity is too painful to keep up for long and rest may then be needed to 'catchup'. Over time it can become harder to keep this up.

You may also use days when you feel a little better to do more, which can mean that the pain increases the next day.



Do you relate to these ways of coping? Sometimes people use one more than the other, or a bit of both. Take some time to think about what feels helpful and less helpful about coping like this. Use the space below if you would find that helpful.

What is helpful about being less active because of pain?	What is unhelpful about being less active because of pain?
What is helpful about pushing through pain to get things done?	What is unhelpful about pushing through pain to get things done?



Key points: Chronic pain can make activity much harder. Think about how you are coping with this challenge. Is this working or adding to your problems?

Activity pacing

Pacing ideas can help you to look for a balance with activity. There is no recipe for pacing and what works for each person will be different, but it can help to:

Aim for a steady level of activity each day.

Aim for a level of activity that you can recover from in a short time, without a flare up of pain.

Not use your pain as a guide about when to stop.

When you use how you feel to decide when to stop it often leads to doing too much. Instead use your own experience as a guide. Ask yourself what usually happens when I do this activity?

There are lots of ways to pace your activity and different ideas may work best in different areas of your life. You are the best judge of what could help you manage activity. Think about:

- Breaking up activity into chunks.
- Using rest breaks in between activities
- Changing activity regularly, move between jobs that are different from each other.
- Experiment until you find what works for you.

Working out baselines

Some people find baselines helpful when working out how much, of any activity, is enough. A baseline is the amount of an activity you can do without flaring up your pain, on at least 5/7 days of the week. For example: What is my baseline for standing?

How often can I stand and feel no worse afterwards?

Sometimes I can cook for about half an hour.

How often can I stand for that long?

On a good day, maybe once a week.

How about on a bad day?

Maybe about 15 minutes.

This will be close to your baseline. The amount of an activity you can do on a bad day will be closer to your baseline than the amount you can do on a good day. This is so that you can regularly manage this activity level and make sure that boom is not followed by bust.



Key points: Pacing involves making changes to how you manage activity. There are many possible changes that may work for you.

Effective rest

Pacing can also involve looking at rest. The amount of rest you take, the timing of your rest breaks and the quality of your rest.

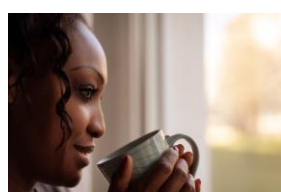
- Is it possible for you to think of rest as important, like taking medicine?
- What needs to change to allow more rest time?
- Could rest be planned in rather than just a reaction to feeling worse?

Rest works a bit like recharging your phone battery. If you wait until it's in the red zone before you plug the phone in, it takes ages before it works effectively again. If instead you plug the phone in more often, keeping it closer to the green, it keeps going. In this way resting little and often can be more helpful than big chunks of activity and big chunks of rest.



When you do rest, does it feel restful?

Have you ever taken 'a break' and then become so lost in your thoughts that your cup of tea is over before you know it? There are many, many ways to make rest feel helpful. Take time to figure out what is right for you.



Rest can sometimes be about change: moving away from a screen, switching your phone off for a bit, moving around, or going outside.

Rest can sometimes be about using your senses: the comfort of a hot drink or soft blanket, listening to music, a smell that you love.

Rest can sometimes be about a soothing activity: colouring, crafting, or a familiar film.

What else can help with pacing activity?

- Ask for help. What more can others in your life do to support you?
- Use aids and gadgets.
- Pause and breathe.
- Pause before you act. Notice that you have choices about how you manage activity.
- Plan ahead rather than 'seeing how it goes'.
- Ditch tasks if not essential or meaningful.
- Spread out tasks across the week. Using a weekly planner can help with this.
- Add less to the 'to do' list.

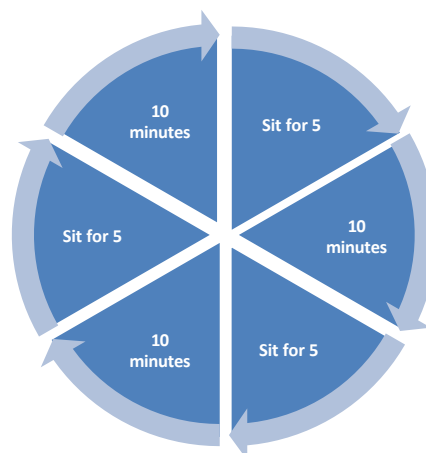


Key points:

- ▶ **Pause and notice what is working well for you, and what is not working. Make choices about your activity rather than working on autopilot.**
- ▶ **Rest is a powerful and important medicine**

Pacing example: Imagine that family or friends have visited and left you with lots of dishes to finish. It is about 7pm and you think the dishes and tidy up will take about 30 minutes, but you are already exhausted from their visit. Usually, 10 minutes on your feet is enough. What choices do you have about this task?

- Keep going in 10-minute chunks, see the chart below.
- 10 mins now, finish tomorrow?
- Put the dishes in to soak overnight?
- Ask for help?
- Rest before making a start?
- What else?



Where do I start with pacing?

Choose an activity to pace. Make it small and make it specific



Choose something that is not working for you now, or choose something that matters to you.



Choose one change from the ideas suggested on these pages, or something else that makes more sense to you.



Try out that change, notice what happens. Does anything about this change feel helpful?



Keep making changes until you find out what works best. Think about how you can use what you have learnt here to make changes to other activities.

For example: Chose 'sitting at work' rather than 'work', chose 'ironing' rather than 'housework'. This will help you to come up with ideas about change, without feeling overwhelmed.

For example: Good reasons to pick 'shopping' could be ;if you always feel worse after a shopping trip or if you enjoy shopping and it is important to you to keep doing this yourself.

Chose whichever change feels like it would be the easiest thing to try and is realistic for you. Getting started with pacing can be the hardest part.

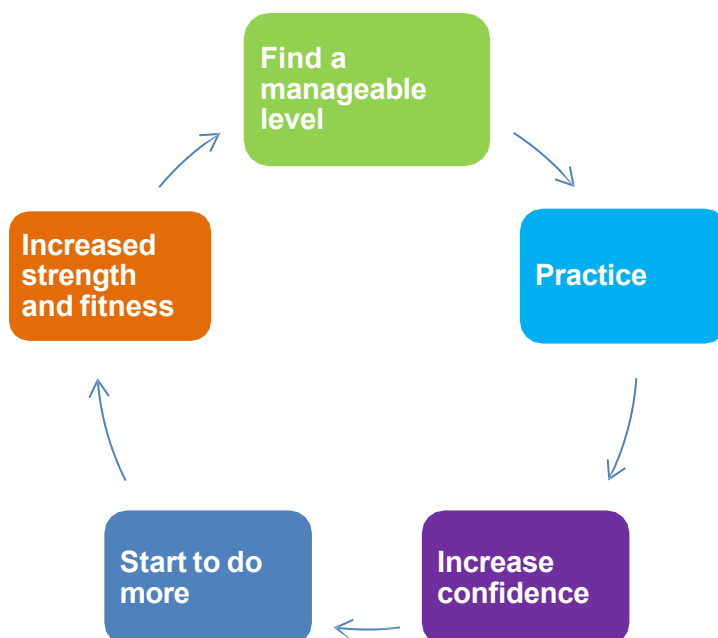
Did the change you tried fit in well with your day? did it make any difference to your energy or pain levels. Small changes can make a big difference, if you keep adding other small changes.



Key points: Small changes in pacing your activity can build up to make a big difference.

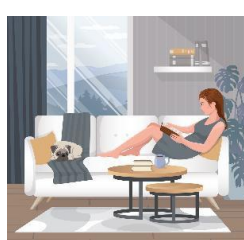
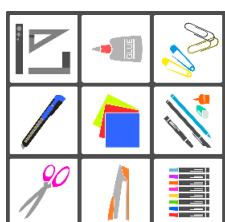
Managing activity: Building up gently

The activity that you can manage now does not have to be fixed. There are no rules about what a person with a certain condition can or cannot manage. Although pain may put some activities out of reach and make it harder to make progress, the nervous system is plastic and changing activity for the better is always possible. Doing more of what is important feels good, and in itself, can be a treatment for chronic pain.



Chose an activity

- What would you like to build up?
- Activity includes anything that interests you.
- Not just physical activity.
- Others with chronic pain have chosen to build up:



Find a manageable level

- Find your starting point
- The amount of an activity you can realistically manage now.
- Without flaring up your pain
- On at least 5/7 days
- We could call this a baseline.
- Think about how you might adjust an activity to find this.

Practice

- Practice creates new pathways in our nervous system.
- We learn what we practice.
- What are we teaching our body when we push ourselves?
- What are we teaching our body when we avoid the activity?
- Can we move closer to a balance?

Increase confidence

- With practice the body learns that the activity is safe and ok.
- To get this right the practice needs to be gentle.
- When we feel safe the sensitivity level reduces.
- This is when you can build up and do more.

Pause and consider

- Have you chosen the right activity for you ?
- E.g. physical activity when you are already on your feet a lot?
- Remember you want this to feel enjoyable and helpful.
- Think about what is right for you now.
- Rather than what you could do in the past.



Key point:

- ▶ **Be flexible with your ideas about activity. Base your plans on what you can do now, rather than what you could do in the past.**
- ▶ **It is possible to do more when you have chronic pain. Start small and practice often.**

Start to do more

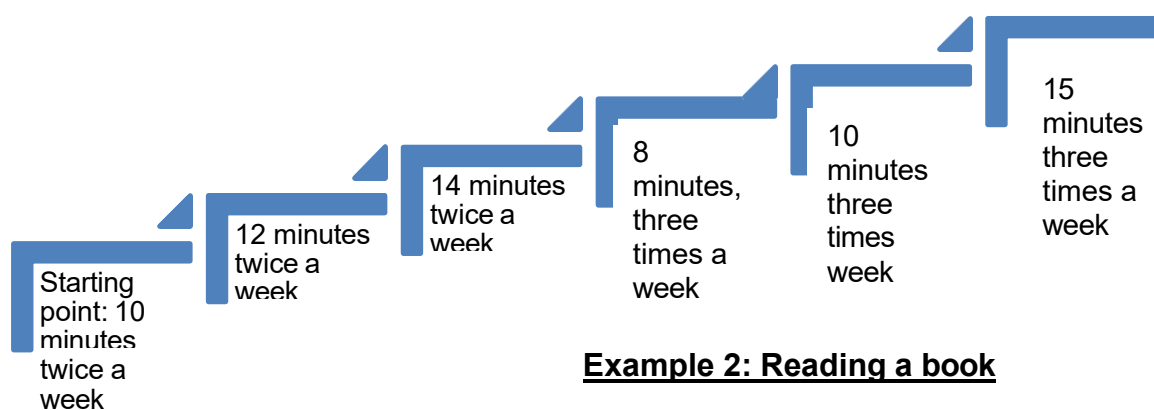
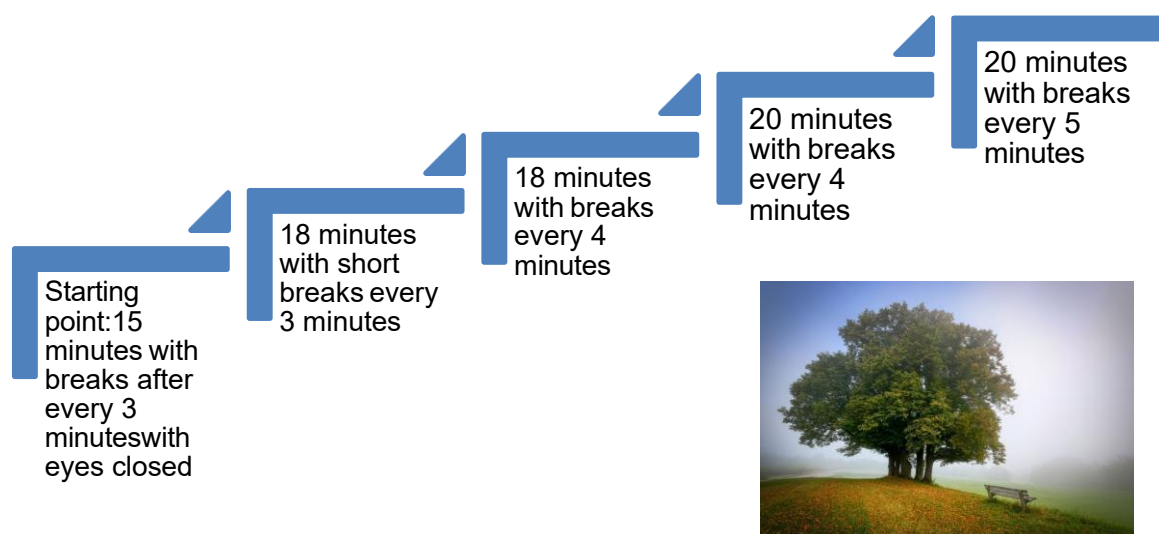


Increased strength
and ability

How to build up

- Increase in small steps
- Build up by no more than 10-20% per week
- If other things are draining your energy keep the activity the same for longer
- If you find you have built up too quickly, try reducing a little rather than stopping
- Try setting a day each week to check in with how the activity is going and to plan how much you are going to do in the week ahead.

Example 1: Walking in the park



Example 2: Reading a book



Managing our Thoughts

Our thoughts - all 4,000 to 100,000 of them every day – are the result of our brain trying to constantly help us to make sense of the world around us.

You might remember that we have talked about the brain as a problem-solving machine. It tends to look for any problems, in order to try to solve them. This is the brain's way of trying to keep us safe and protect us from any threats in our environment so that when we are faced with a challenge, we are prepared for it.

Caveman analogy:

Imagine these two scenarios - One caveman comes wandering out of his cave without a care in the world. A second caveman predicts the worst and thinks that there could be a Sabre Tooth tiger around the corner. The second caveman is more likely to proceed with caution and check the area is safe before leaving his cave. Who is more likely to survive???



Survival of the Fittest:

Psychological researchers have found that the brain has evolved to be able to cope with immediate danger. However, it doesn't just think about the present, it also thinks about the past and future. It is therefore a very **normal** function of the brain to predict the worst-case scenario or to re-analyse past events that did not go well in order to try and find solutions. It is aiming to keep us safe and make sure past mistakes are not repeated.

But... Is this ALWAYS helpful?

Unlike our caveman ancestors we are not faced with as many situations where there is an immediate threat around the corner. This doesn't stop our brain looking, that is its job after all! We can therefore find it easier to get caught up with thoughts of worst-case scenarios far in the future. We can also get caught up in trying to "solve" things which have already happened and cannot be changed.

Thoughts can't be controlled:

If I were to say to you, whatever you do, **DO NOT think about a pink elephant!!!!** Is it possible to control your mind not to think about a pink elephant? OR does trying hard not to think about a pink elephant, make it much more likely for this to come into our minds. It can be the same with thoughts and feelings and physical sensations. The more we try not to think of an uncomfortable thought, or emotion or sensation the more we can actually increase our struggle with these and the more likely we are to then experience distress. Trying very hard to control our minds can often leave us feeling like we have less control.

The danger of getting “hooked” by our thoughts:

When we get caught up in our thoughts and emotions, this can influence our behaviours and actions. This at times might lead to us making choices that are not in line with what we value the most, or what might be more helpful to us in the longer term. Getting hooked with our thoughts might take us **away** from our values rather than **towards** what we value.

Example: Going for Coffee with a Friend:

- **Situation** - Meeting a friend for Coffee.
- **Thoughts** - “I can’t go feeling this way” - “What if I’m in too much pain?” - “How will I manage?” “I’m not going to be good company” - “I will not cope” - “I can’t do this”.
- **Feelings**- Anxiety , fear
- **Action**.....

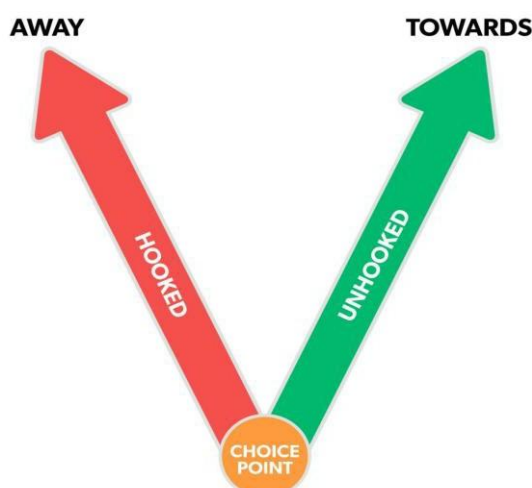
**Cancel meeting friend.
Withdraw and stay at home.**

Short term =

- Relief / Less anxious.
- “I don’t have to put myself through that!”

Long term =

- Guilt - give self a hard time. Sadness - I didn’t see friend.
- Worry they will not want to see me in the future.
- Possible loss of connection.



Still go for coffee OR arrange for friend to visit me instead.

Short term =

- Have to face feelings of anxiety.
- Put up with my mind trying to talk me out of it.

Long term =

- Get enjoyment from seeing friend.
- Increased sense of connection.
- Sense of achievement that I managed to go & see them.
- Improved mood.
- Engaged with valued activity.
- More motivated to do again in future.



Key points:

- ▶ It is normal for our minds to be constantly full of thoughts.
- ▶ Trying to control our thoughts can lead to us getting hooked up in these which can lead to increased distress.
- ▶ Getting hooked by our thoughts can lead to us acting in line with these and moving away from our values rather than towards them.

Some Facts about Thoughts:

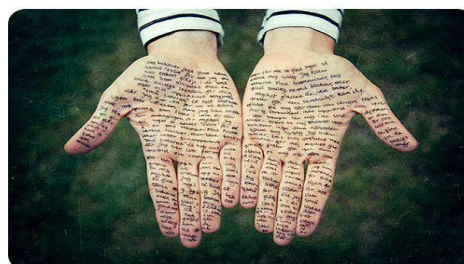
Thoughts...

- Can be words, an image, a memory, a physical sensation, an imagined sound, or based on 'intuition' – a sense of just 'knowing'.
- **Are believable** – we tend to automatically believe our thoughts, usually not stopping to question their validity. However, thoughts are not necessarily true, accurate or helpful. For example: when another driver cuts me up, I might judge that he's a selfish thoughtless toad, but in fact, he might be taking his wife to hospital as she's about to give birth.
- **Are Automatic** - thoughts pop into our head and you often won't even notice them.
- **Are ours** – they can be quite specific to us, perhaps because of our present or past experience, knowledge, values and culture, or just for no good reason at all. Some thoughts are so out of keeping with all those things, and that can make them seem all the more distressing – because we add some meaning about why we had them (I must be a bad person!).
- **Are habitual and persistent** – our thoughts seem to repeat over and over, and the more they repeat, the more believable they seem, then they set off a whole chain of new related thoughts that lead us to feel worse and worse.
- Thoughts are simply electro-chemical impulses in our brain – **Thoughts are NOT statements of fact.**

Hands as Thoughts

We discussed the *hands as thoughts* metaphor in session. We likened being hooked by our thoughts to having our hands right in front of our face. It is very difficult to see past our hands and also very difficult to see the hands themselves.

It is much more helpful to be able to hold our hands away from our face and create distance. That way, we can engage more with what is going on around us, but we are also able to see our hands in more detail. In the same way, creating a distance between us and our thoughts can enable us to be more aware in the present moment. This can help us to put thoughts into context (they are just thoughts) and help us to make more informed decisions which are more in line with our values.



Signs we are hooked by our thoughts:

Mind - Mind is racing. Trying very hard to analyse/problem solve. Thoughts all merge into one. Difficult to clearly see what we are thinking.

Emotions - Increased distress. We may become more anxious/irritable/frustrated/angry/sad. Could feel hopeless and overwhelmed.

Physical Sensations - Heart races, changes in breathing, tensed muscles, changes in temperature (sweaty limbs or cold hands), pain is increased.

Behaviours - We become focused on trying to reduce symptoms –e.g. stop our mind racing, reduce emotional discomfort and physical sensations. We let our problem-solving mind make decisions on autopilot. These are often ‘quick and easy’ solutions which in the long term can move us away from our values rather than towards. This can increase our distress over time.

Which of these signs do you most notice in yourself when you feel “hooked in” by your thoughts?

What kind of thoughts about pain do you notice “hooking you in”? *(Don’t worry about changing these thoughts, we will tackle that next section. For now, we are more interested in starting to notice what kinds of thoughts you have that might be unhelpful to you)*

Helpful Strategies

1. Noticing:

First step to becoming unhooked is noticing what our mind is doing. We need to be able to notice what our mind is doing before we can do anything about it. How do we do this? -

Mindfulness practice – becoming more present in everyday situations. **This can include giving you an “anchor”, or something to focus on, for example:**

Simple Breathing Exercises – Try just noticing your breathing - notice the rhythm of your breath, the sensations of your chest rising and falling, the temperature of the air as it enters and leaves your body.



Noticing the sights and sounds around you - e.g. noticing the trees blowing in the wind or noticing the detail of an object you can see/hold.

Noticing the sensory experience of a task - e.g. smell and touch of the soapy suds whilst doing washing up.



Visualisation exercises – e.g. Leaves on Stream, Clouds in the sky, or Passengers on a train (try searching on YouTube for many guided visualisations).

2. Grounding strategies

Focusing in even more detail on something that is happening in the **here and now** can help ground you into the present moment. One example is the **5 Senses Exercise**:

5 Senses Exercise

5: Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. It could be a pen, a spot on the ceiling, anything in your surroundings.

4: Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you. It could be your hair, a pillow, or the ground under your feet.

3: Acknowledge THREE things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you can hear your belly rumbling those counts! Focus on things you can hear outside of your body.

2: Acknowledge TWO things you can smell. Maybe you are in your office and smell pencil, or maybe you are in your bedroom and smell a pillow. If you need to take a brief walk to find a scent you could smell soap in your bathroom, or nature outside.

1: Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like—gum, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch?

3. Distancing from thoughts:

Self-talk examples – Try to notice the thoughts in your mind and hear what they say. Once you spot this, you can change this “self-talk” by adding one of the following phrases:

- *I'm having the thought that...*
- *I am noticing...*
- *Thank you, brain, cheers for that...*

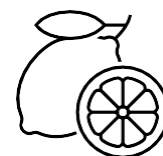
By being able to change the “self-talk” in your mind, this immediately creates a distance between you and the thought. You are able to recognise it is a thought you are having, change it, and give yourself more say over how to respond to your thoughts in general.

4. Use of language:

Singing and silly voices - By singing or using a silly voice to sound out your thoughts, this can remind you that they are just your thoughts, and that you can play with them if you like. It can help these thoughts to lose their meaning, and the feelings and emotions attached to them can lessen.



“Lemons, Lemons, Lemons” - In the same way repeating over and over even the most horrible thoughts can lead to them losing their meaning and reducing our struggle with them.



Kick your ‘buts’ / (also “should” &” musts”) - Finally, remember the language our mind uses can be very powerful! It is helpful to notice and be aware of the language our mind uses as this can have a strong influence over our behaviour and can move us away from our values rather than towards.



For example, replacing “but” with “and” can give you with a very different outlook on a situation. E.g. “*I would arrange to meet my friend, **but** my pain will be there*”. Could be changed to “*I would arrange to meet my friend, **and** my pain will be there*”.

It can also be very helpful to be aware of unwritten rules or demands the mind has for us that can appear in the language we use. If we can notice thoughts such as:

- “*I **must** just finish this task now that I’ve started*”
- “*I **should** be coping better than this.*”
- “*I **shouldn’t** be feeling this way*”

We can respond by going - “**Who says?**” - “*Is this my problem-solving brain trying to look for problems? Or trying to find easy solutions to push away discomfort?*”



Key points:

- ▶ **Being able to recognise signs that we are getting hooked by our thoughts can help us to distance ourselves from these, so they do not get in the way of us engaging in what is important.**
- ▶ **Mindfulness and Grounding strategies can help us to unhook from thoughts and to be more present.**
- ▶ **Strategies such as self-talk and being aware of the language we use, or types of thought patterns can also help us to distance ourselves from unhelpful thoughts.**

5. Recognising Thinking Traps

If we can notice these common thinking traps (which ALL of us fall into, many times a day!), we can consider if there is anything we may be “missing”, and get more distance from our thoughts.

All or nothing thinking

You think in extremes about situations, other people, or yourself. Your thoughts might be polarised: things are either ‘perfect’ or ‘terrible’. You may also act in just as extreme ways, veering between extreme effort and none at all.



Magnification and minimisation

You exaggerate negative aspects of yourself, other people, or situations, while downplaying the positive aspects. Bad things get blown out of proportion, whilst good things seem unimportant.



Disqualifying the positive

You ignore, dismiss, or discount your positive attributes and experiences. Receiving positive feedback might feel strange or uncomfortable to you, so you automatically reject it.



Mental filter

You base your conclusions on a single detail taken out of context, and might ignore or discount other bits of information. People tend to filter when they are faced with evidence that doesn’t ‘fit’ with their beliefs.



Emotional reasoning

You assume something must be true because you feel it strongly. Your feelings, hunches, or instincts guide how you interpret a situation.



Overgeneralisation

You make a sweeping judgement or conclusion based on just one experience or a small number of incidents. You believe an isolated event will become a pattern and repeat itself in the future.



Jumping to conclusions

You make hasty judgements or decisions based on a limited amount of information. You might assume you know what other people are thinking, or use your intuition to make snap judgements.



Personalising

You assume that situations or outcomes are related to you, especially negative ones. You might unfairly believe that you caused things to happen.



Labelling

You give yourself, other people, or your experiences a one-word label. These labels are usually fixed, extreme, and negative – they stir up strong emotional reactions and stop you noticing other aspects of your experience.



“Should” statements

Your style of thinking focuses on “must”, “should”, “ought to”, and “have to” statements. It leads to fixed ideas about how you, other people, and the world should be.



Which of the strategies we mentioned above for “unhooking” from thoughts might you consider trying?

Medication and Chronic pain

Medication often plays a part in the management of chronic pain. However, it does not cure pain, and it is normal to notice only a small change in how you feel. Remember that chronic pain is different to acute, or short lived, pain. So, medication that can work very well for acute pain is much less useful when pain persists. Sometimes people find a drug creates some 'distance' from the pain, changing how you feel about it, rather than changing the pain itself.



What to expect from a pain medication

When a drug is approved for use, scientists need to be open and honest about how effective it has been when tested. We now know that only about 4 in 10 people with chronic pain will benefit from taking pain medication long term. For medicines called opioids, which are drugs like Tramadol, codeine, and morphine, it is likely to be only 1 in 10 people who get benefit. (figures from www.LiveWellWithPain.co.uk 2023). Many people take these medications without any benefit even though they do experience side effects.

When pain medication is developed and tested scientists consider:

- a 30% reduction in pain as effective
- a 50% reduction in pain as very effective

So, it is normal for 'painkillers' not to 'kill' your pain.



Key point: Medication is much less effective in reducing pain than we might think or hope

Side effects to medication

Side effects to pain medication are common. It can sometimes be hard to work out whether symptoms are related to your health conditions or to the medications you take for them. There is a lot of individual difference in sensitivity to medication. Some will notice many side effects on small doses and others tolerate higher doses with few problems. For a medication to be useful to you, it is often a case of balance. Do the benefits, for you, outweigh the side effects?

Problems with Opioids

The opioid family of medication includes Codeine (present in Co-Codamol), Dihydrocodeine, Tramadol, Morphine, Fentanyl, and Oxycodone. If you are taking opioid medication for pain, you may notice some of these side effects:

- **Feeling dizzy, or sick**
- **Sweating**
- **Confusion, forgetfulness**
- **Constipation**
- **Weight gain**
- **Dry Mouth**
- **Reduce sex drive, erectile dysfunction**
- **Sleep problems**
- **Sleepiness**

You may also experience:

Increased pain

Difficulty fighting infections

Euphoria (feeling high)

Mood changes

Feeling emotionally numb

Falls, risk of fractures

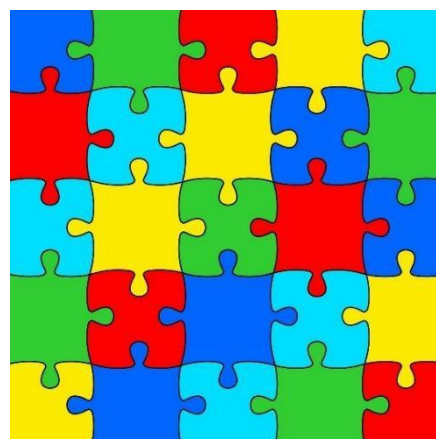
Over time your body becomes used to opioids and this often means they become less effective. This is why stronger opioids are often not the answer, as the body will just get used to them too. Any improvement in pain is temporary and comes with more side effects. Being on the lowest effective daily dose can help prevent this process and means that there is room for a temporary increase if you have a flare up. Getting the balance right with medication can involve considering:

- Are you on the right type of medication for your pain?
- Is it working to relieve some of your pain?
- Is the medication allowing you to do more of what is important to you?
- What side effects do you experience?
- Do the benefits outweigh the side effects?
- Are you taking the medication at the best time of day?
- Are you taking more or less of the medication than suggested for you?
- Is the suggested dose right for you?

It is important to see medication as just one part of managing pain alongside other pain management strategies. A bit like pieces of a jigsaw....



Key point: Managing chronic pain with medication alone is not likely to feel helpful



If you decide you want to reduce medication it is very important **not** to make any sudden changes without getting advice. Your GP or practice pharmacist can help you to make a safe reduction plan.

Reducing medication for pain can be scary. It may help to know that many people do reduce or come off pain drugs and report feeling the same or better than they did before. You can learn more about others experiences here:

<https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources-for-people-with-pain/ten-footsteps-to-living-well-with-pain/medicines-and-nutrition/>

Our body can become dependent on certain drugs that are taken regularly; the system just gets used to having the drug there. This is not the same as being addicted to the medication. Getting more pain, or other unpleasant symptoms, when you first reduce a dose does not mean that the drug must be working for you. What you may be feeling is withdrawal, a temporary reaction to your body getting used to the drug not being there. This will pass but may mean that you should take the reduction more slowly. Also remember:

- Smaller doses of medications are often available to help you reduce slowly.
- Only reduce one medication at a time.
- As you lower the dose, keep taking the medication regularly, do not miss doses.
- It often helps if you feel in control of the speed of the reduction.



Key points:

- **If you want to reduce medication, ask for support.**
- **Some of the symptoms you experience may be caused by medication side effects, rather than being part of your pain condition**
- **Feeling worse when you first make a reduction does not mean the drug was helping. Instead, it may mean that a slower reduction would work better for you**

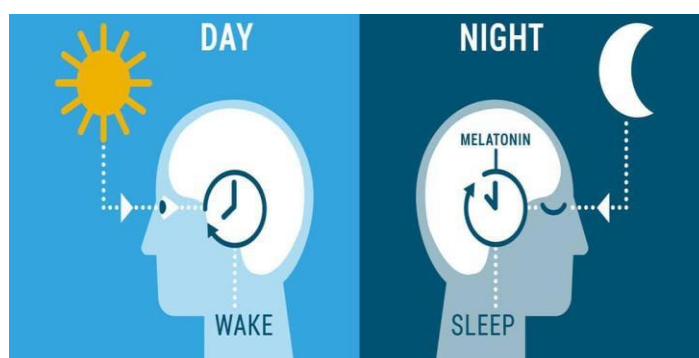
Sleep

What happens in our body when we go to sleep?

We have an internal body clock called the Circadian rhythm which influences our sleep-wake cycle. This determines when we might be feeling sleepier or more awake.

Different hormones influence this:

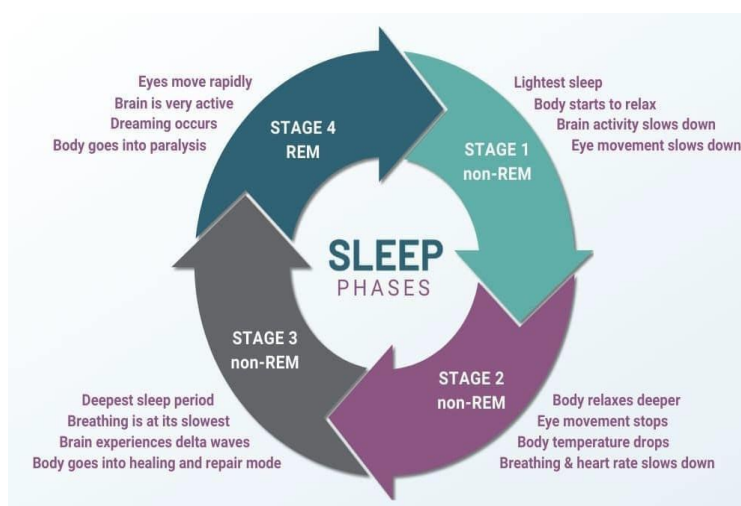
- Melatonin = hormone that's produced at night-time to help us go to sleep.
- Cortisol = hormone that's produced at daytime to help us wake up and become alert.
-



Why do we sleep?

- **To process memories** – organise and store memories of the previous day
- **To restore the body** – replenish energy, grow muscle, heal tissue, and synthesize hormones

Sleep Phases



- Each sleep cycle takes an average of 1.5 hours.
- A key fact about sleep cycles is that we go through multiple stages of sleep, including light sleep, deep sleep, and REM sleep. The light sleep phase is the easiest to awaken from, and it typically occurs several times throughout the night. In fact, most people cycle through these stages every 90 minutes, meaning that waking briefly

during light sleep is normal and can happen multiple times a night without impacting overall sleep quality.

- This is why you might find yourself waking up and easily falling back asleep without any lasting disruption to your rest.
- Each sleep cycle (meaning each time someone completes all 4 stages of sleep), takes less amount of time to get completed as the night progresses, but on average each cycle takes 1.5 hours to get completed. We tend to wake up after REM is complete – if you still feel tired after 7 to 9 hours of sleep, this is a good indication that you are waking yourself up before a cycle is completed. A good rule of thumb is set your alarm to wake up either 6, 7.5 or 9 hours after getting to sleep to avoid this.

Review Time! True or False?

Statement	True or False?
It isn't normal to wake during the night	False – We can often get frustrated at waking during the night, but this is normal – many people don't notice, they just turn over and go back to sleep. Waking up occasionally during the night is actually quite common and can be a normal part of the sleep cycle. Unless these awakenings lead to significant disruption or difficulty falling back asleep, they usually aren't a cause for concern. Understanding that this is a normal occurrence can help reduce anxiety about sleep and promote a more restful night.
Most adults need 7-8 hours' sleep per night	False – Sleep needs vary by individual and life stage, with adults typically needing 7-9 hours per night. Personal energy levels are key indicators of sufficient sleep. While some can function well on 7 hours, others may need more, and inadequate sleep can negatively affect health. If you're struggling with concentration or fatigue, consider improving your sleep quality.
People need less sleep as they get older	True - many people tend to need less sleep as they age. Factors such as changes in health, lifestyle, and sleep patterns can influence sleep requirements in older age. However, quality of sleep remains important at any age.
We should try and make up for lost sleep	False - While catching up on sleep occasionally can help you feel more rested, it doesn't fully counteract the negative effects

	of chronic sleep deprivation. Research shows that consistently missing sleep can lead to long-term health issues, cognitive decline, and impaired performance. Relying on "catch-up" sleep can also disrupt your body's natural sleep-wake cycle, making it harder to maintain a healthy sleep routine. The best approach is to prioritize regular, sufficient sleep each night rather than trying to compensate later.
Life changes can trigger insomnia	True - Our circadian rhythms can be knocked off course by disruptions during the day, such as napping, stress, travel, caffeine or other substances. Keeping a consistent routine and sleep schedule can help maintain a healthy circadian rhythm.

You might notice these are all things that we do **before** sleep to try and set ourselves up for maintaining a good sleep cycle.

When we are in bed, the harder we try to sleep the harder it can be to actually fall asleep.

Take the example below – are these types of thoughts relatable to when you are trying to get to sleep? How do they make you feel – sleepier or more frustrated? Notice the impact these thoughts have on how you are feeling.

Vicious Cycle



Understanding the Vicious Cycle of Sleep Disruption

Negative Thoughts: It often starts with the belief that you won't be able to sleep, creating a sense of frustration.

Increased Alertness: This thought leads to heightened alertness as your body releases stress hormones, making it harder to relax.

Anxiety: As awareness of your sleeplessness grows, anxiety increases, causing you to worry about the impact of not sleeping.

Struggle to Sleep: In an attempt to combat this anxiety, you may try even harder to fall asleep, resulting in tension and restlessness.

Cycle Reinforcement: When sleep doesn't come, the original negative thought is reinforced, continuing the cycle of anxiety and sleeplessness.

Breaking the Cycle – How can we set ourselves up for better sleep?

Actually, things we can do that are most helpful for sleep are things we do in preparation before bedtime.

Sleep pressure is basically your body's way of telling you it's time to sleep. **Throughout the day**, as you stay awake and do activities, a substance called adenosine builds up in your brain. The longer you're awake, the more adenosine accumulates, making you feel increasingly tired and ready for sleep.

Here's how it works:

1. **Daily Activities Matter:** Everything you do during the day—working, exercising, even just being active—adds to your sleep pressure. The more you engage in these activities, the stronger your urge to sleep becomes.
2. **The Struggle to Sleep:** When it's time for bed, you might feel anxious or try really hard to fall asleep. However, focusing too much on trying to sleep can actually make it harder. Instead of helping, this effort can increase your alertness and make you feel more awake.
3. **Relaxation is Key:** Instead of pushing yourself to sleep, it's often more helpful to wind down and let your body's natural sleep pressure do its job. Creating a calming bedtime routine can help your body relax and make it easier to drift off when the time is right.

In short, sleep pressure is a **natural process that builds throughout the day based on what you do**. Embracing relaxation rather than forcing sleep can lead to better, more restful nights.

Note these are all things we do before we get to sleep.

Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular sleep routine • Sleep hygiene • Stress management
Limiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caffeine, Nicotine, Alcohol • Sleep pressure- trying too hard to fall asleep!
Avoiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large meal before bed • Napping (>30 mins) • Phones and devices close to bedtime

Tips to Improve Sleep:

- Reduce caffeine and alcohol (this includes soda drinks, teas, and even chocolate!)
- Avoid nicotine before bed and during the night
- Avoid having a big meal just before bedtime
- Explore positions of comfort
- Keep your bedroom for sleep and intimate relationships only
- Create a bedroom environment that comforts you (*think of temperature, light, furniture etc*)
- Think about your activity level throughout the day
- Create a sleep routine
 - Unwind
 - Limit the use of mobile phones and devices – try to read a book or listen to the radio instead
 - Same going to sleep, and waking time even during the weekends
- Go to bed when you're 'sleepy tired'
- Save your sleep for night-time if you can
 - If you need to nap, make sure it's less than 30 minutes
- Limit your time in bed awake
 - Get up after 20 minutes if you cannot sleep and do something soothing
- Let go of trying to sleep!



What changes can you commit to improving your sleep?



Key points:

- Our body has natural rhythms to aid our sleep, and sleep is actually made up of many sleep cycles.
- The most useful ways to aid sleep are to do things which support, instead of disrupt, these natural cycles.
- It is normal that people's sleep needs can vary lots between different people and reduce across the lifespan.

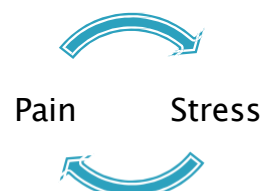
Chronic pain and stress

Living with chronic pain is stressful and this stress can make pain worse. Long term stress can cause other symptoms, which can add to health difficulties and sometimes cause worry or anxiety.

The biology of stress

Stress is the response of the body and mind to danger, or to the possibility of danger. We feel stress in our mind and in our body.

The stress response has been very helpful in the survival of human beings. Thinking about evolution, if a primitive man or woman did not react to danger, they would have been unlikely to survive for long in a dangerous world of wild animals. Therefore, our ancestors were not the chilled-out ones! Our ancestors were the most danger aware, the ones with the best developed stress systems. And so, we have evolved with excellent awareness of threat.

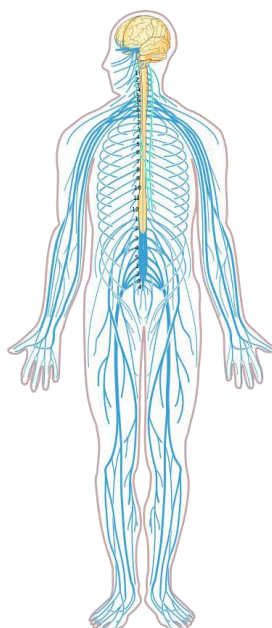


Our body and mind react to immediate danger, or the possibility of danger, to help us to respond to protect ourselves. Adrenalin and cortisol are released into the blood stream and travel around the body, causing the following changes:

Thoughts focus on what is happening now and all senses sharpen.

We might sweat as our body tries to reach the most helpful temperature.

Blood is diverted to muscles, and they tense, and away from the stomach and gut.



Heart beats faster and breathing rate speeds up.

Saliva is not produced, and mouth can feel dry.

Anything happening in the body that is not going to help respond in this moment is slowed or shut down. This includes any healing or fighting infection.



Key point: Stress is a physical reaction as well as an emotion or feeling. This reaction is automatic and often helpful in keeping us alive. Getting us ready for fight, flight, or freeze.

Our amazing brains

There is part of our brain has not much changed since the time of primitive man and woman. This is why we still react to threat in the same way that they did, even though life does not bring us the same kind of dangers.

However, our brain has also developed in amazing ways, and we have newer parts to the brain that allow us to: imagine, invent, create, communicate, wonder, reason and more. The newer parts of our brain make the stress response tricky to manage. Think about this situation:



You are walking down the street...



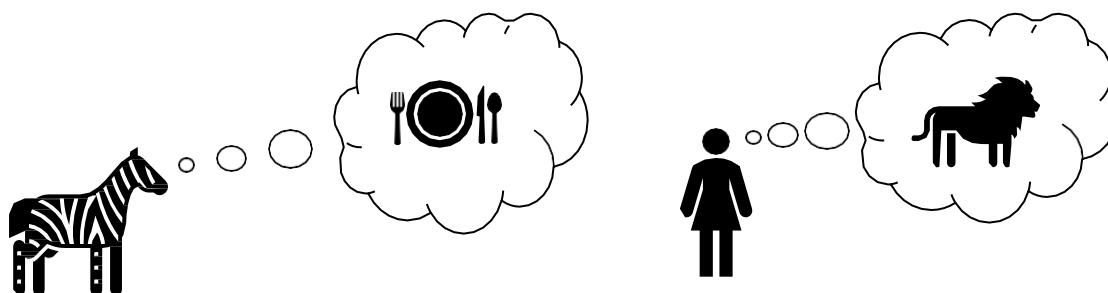
on your way to the shops...



when you see a lion.

What do you do? Of course, there would be a stress response to help you to fight, freeze or runaway. Getting to a safe place and away from the lion would be a priority and adrenalin and cortisol will be released to help you achieve this.

What happens next? Once you are safe and the stress response is no longer needed, do you feel calm straight away and ready to continue with the shopping or stop for a snack? You may have noticed that animals, who do not have our more advanced brains, can get on with their day once a danger has passed. Think about a zebra once the lion has left the area. But our ability to imagine, analyse, reason, wonder means that we would not find this so easy!

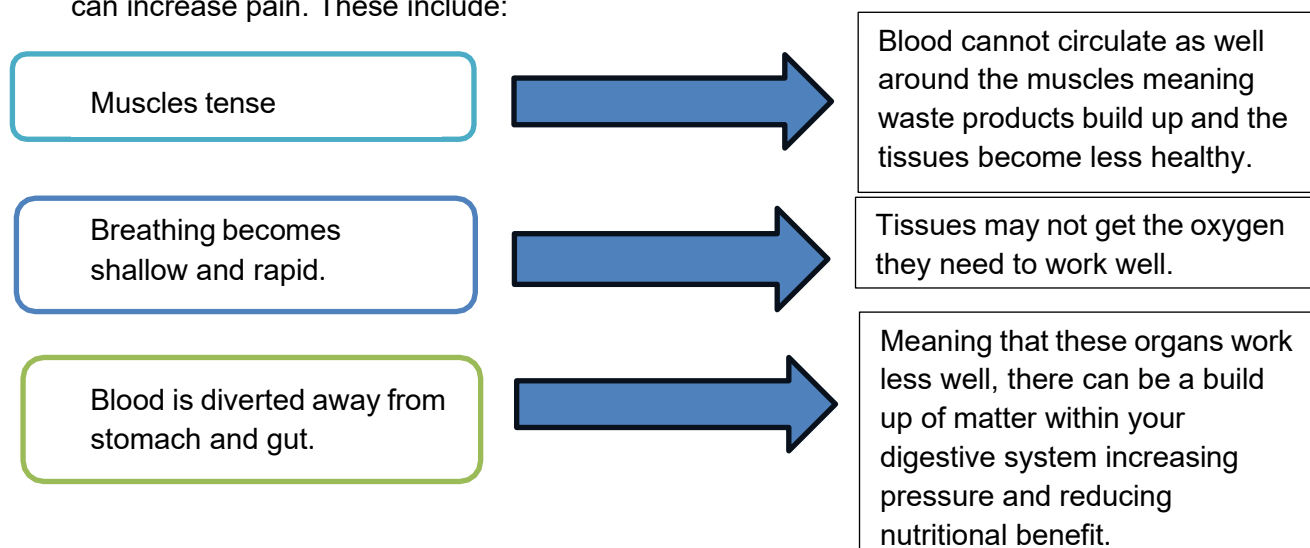


We do not need for a stressful event to be happening now, or even to have ever happened, to feel the stress response. We can imagine what could have happened, or what may happen in the future, we can think about why, how, and what we would do. We do not ask for this, or cause it to happen, this is just the way our brain works.



Key point: The way our brains work means that thinking about something stressful brings about the same changes in our body as the stressful thing

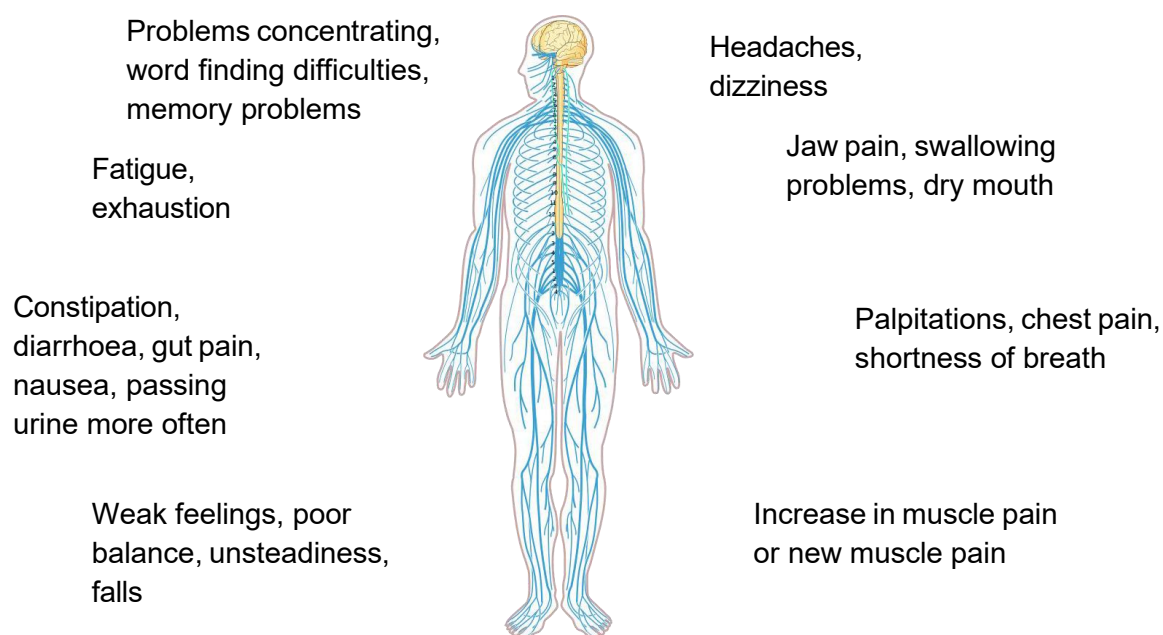
There are many ways in which the physical changes that happen during the stress response can increase pain. These include:



All these changes activate the nerve endings that are part of the pain system. In addition Adrenalin and cortisol in the blood stream will directly change the nerve endings, making them more sensitive to other changes.

When stress levels stay high

Long term health problems cause levels of the stress hormones Adrenalin and Cortisol in the blood stream, to remain high over time. Your system cannot be constantly ready for fight, flight, or freeze. Therefore, the symptoms of long-term stress are different. Do you relate to any of the following?



Being more aware of how stress feels for you can be the first step in managing it helpfully. Take some time to notice more about

Where you feel stress most in your body?

What emotions show up for you when experiencing stress?

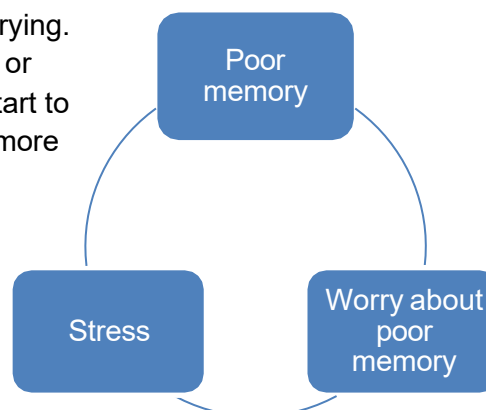
How stress changes what you do?



Key points: To manage the impact of stress we need to notice when it shows up. Aim to recognise stress before it feels overwhelming.

What if it's not stress?

Experiencing the symptoms of long-term stress can be worrying. Memory loss for example, or feeling unsteady, palpitations or shortness of breath, it is easy to understand how we can start to wonder what else is going wrong and why! Of course, the more we worry about these symptoms, the more we trigger the stress response and the worse the symptoms might be. Think about this example.



What can help?

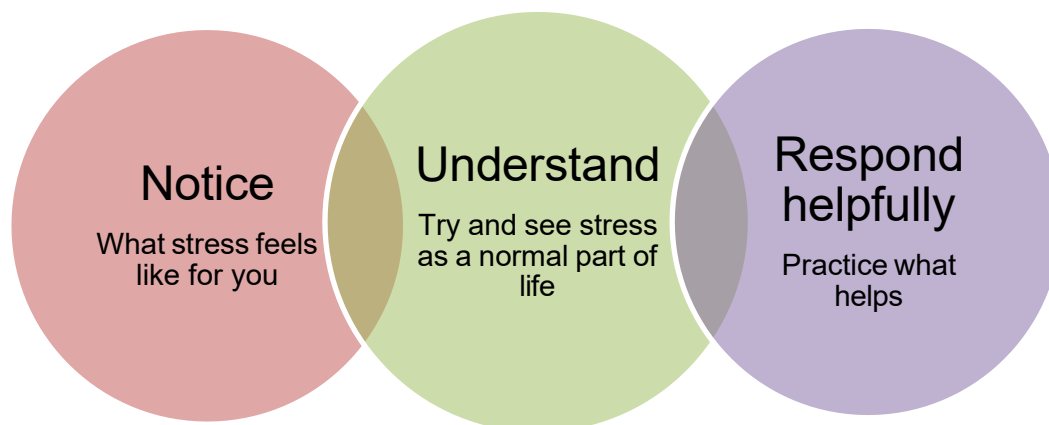
- Understand that there are many symptoms that are part of a normal response to long term stress.
- Talk to others about your health worries.
- Think about what you need to know to feel reassured.
- Take your questions to someone who can answer them, GP, Physiotherapist, nurse, support group?
-



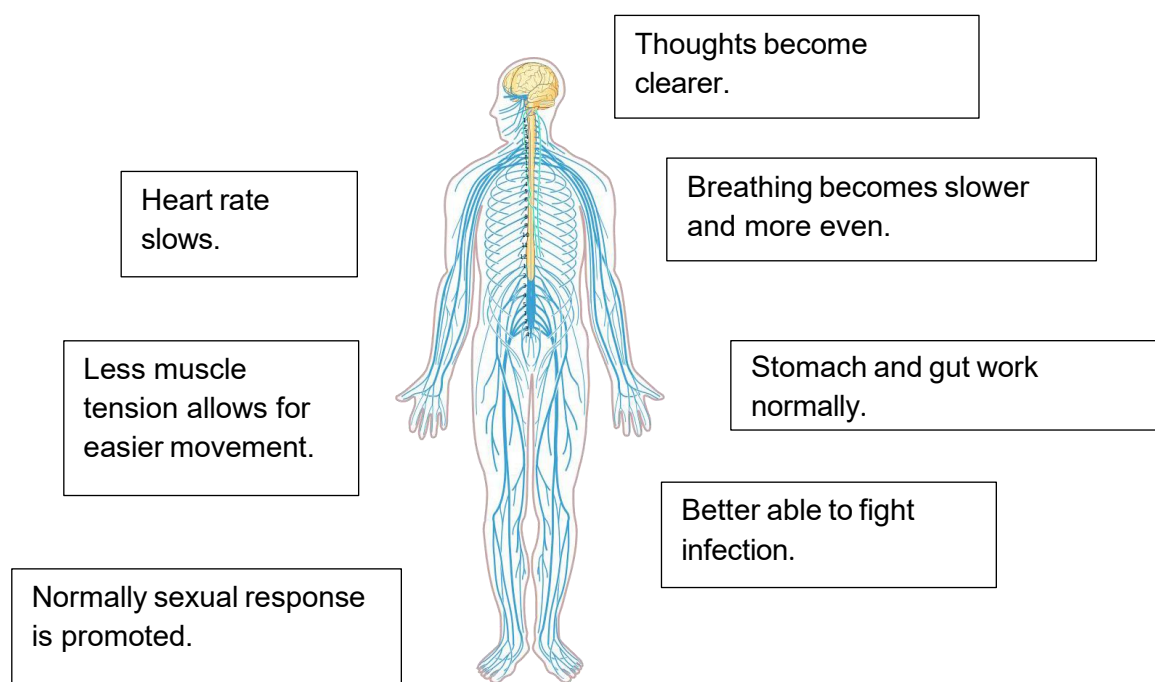
Key points: It is important that you can get advice about other health concerns when you have chronic pain, and don't feel that you are being dismissed. However, it helps to try and accept that many health concerns are related to chronic pain, because of the impact on the stress response, and this doesn't mean they are less real or less deserving of advice or

What can we do to manage stress?

Managing stress is not about getting rid of it. We need some stress in our lives every day to help us to get things done. Would I get to work on time, or stay safe on the roads without the stress response? The goal is to keep the stress response in the zone where it helps rather than overwhelms.



In the same way that we have a stress response we also have a calm response, sometimes called 'rest and digest'. The main chemical involved is Acetylcholine. When this chemical is released, the following changes happen:



Most of us use our 'rest and digest' system much less often than our stress system. This is because the stress system is more helpful for survival and our biology is more concerned with keeping us alive than helping us to feel good. A system that fires up less often finds it harder and harder to kick in. Sometimes we are so used to **not** feeling this way that, if we do, it feels alien or strange.



Key points: We may need to work on the ability to de stress. It may not come easily or naturally but anything we practice grows stronger.

Aim to learn what helps you to feel calmer, more in control, what gives you energy or makes you feel more settled. We usually need a range of options and to think about what would work....

- in different places
- with others
- when on your own,
- when feeling wound up
- when feeling less wound up
- when you have little time
- when you have more time
- when you have familiar things around you

Learning to bring a balance to stress

You may be finding it hard to think of anything that makes you feels calm, rested, or relaxed. If so, that's ok, but it is likely to be very helpful to try and explore this now. Here are some ideas from others with chronic health problems, try these out or come up with something new. Highlight anything that you think looks interesting or make a note of any other ideas you may have.

Take a bath

Listen to music

Light a candle

Write a journal

Draw or colour

Look after house plants

Spend time with your pet

Consider getting a pet

Consider borrowing a pet

Call a friend

Text a friend

Write to a friend

Sit in nature

Try a new craft activity

Bring back a familiar craft activity

Try a word puzzle

Teach yourself a card game

Try a jigsaw

Lie down with your feet up on a wall

Try some gentle Tai Chi

Use your imagination to take you somewhere calming in your mind.

Use a fidget toy

Try a meditation exercise

Close your eyes and focus on sounds around you

View some art

Turn off all electronics for a bit

Find a great book

Drive somewhere new

Drive somewhere familiar with a great view

Chose food you really enjoy and practice eating more slowly

Find a comforting texture

Find a way to enjoy your favourite smells.

Notice the detail in things around you

Try an audio book

Plant some seeds and care for them daily

Put on some music and dance

Make a comforting warm drink and focus on enjoying it

Bring some nature indoors

Pick or buy some fresh flowers

Plan in regular time on your own and help others to

Look at photographs with happy memories

Fill a hot water bottle

Try some stretches

Watch or read something funny

Pause to look out of the window

Try taking 5 slow breaths little and often

Plan some small ways to be kind to others

Look for guided breathing exercises online

Start feeding the birds and watching them from your home

Plan and take some short walks in places you can get to easily

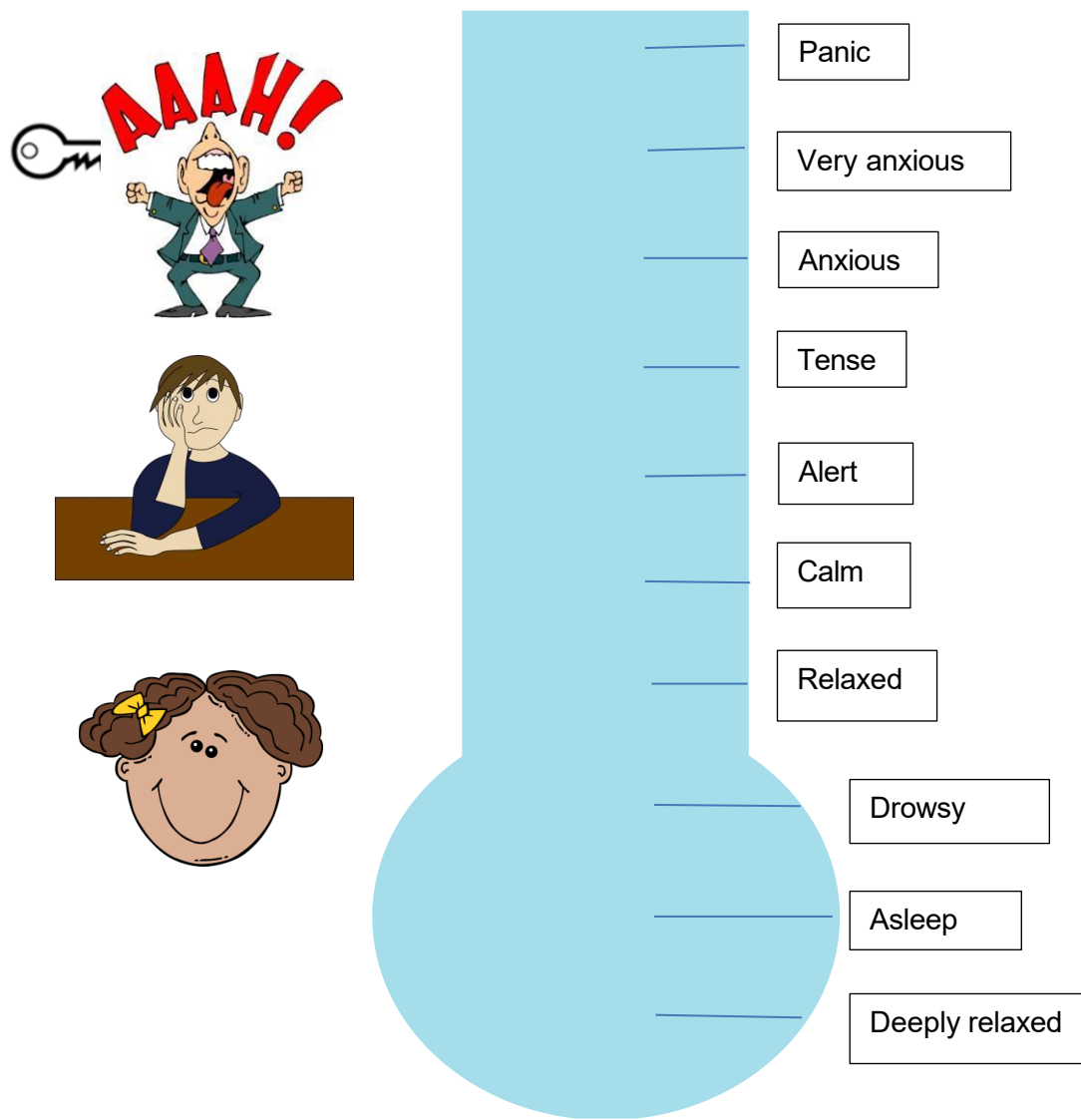
A Stress thermometer

Spending more time on activities like is not likely to make a *big* change in the way you feel. Searching *only* for something that makes you feel 'very relaxed' can mean that you miss small changes that can still be very helpful, when added to other things you are doing to manage your pain.

We can think about how wound up or stressed we feel like levels on a thermometer. Don't worry too much about the words we use here, they may not fit for you. Think more about the idea that we might be at one level much of the time and we might go up or down as things happen, as thoughts come up for us or as pain changes.

If we find ourselves at a tense or anxious level much of the time, tense or anxious might feel normal. We might not have a sense of '*being stressed*' but the impact of stress could still be having an effect on health.

When we find things that help us to move down the thermometer, timing is important. Relaxing or calming activities can be powerful, but they are not magic. You are unlikely to find yourself moving from anxious to drowsy after 5 minutes of breathing exercises. But you might move from anxious to alert i.e. down a bit. You may not feel much better in that moment. However the next time something happens to move you up the thermometer, you will not move as high as you would have had you not found time for practice. This is why using calming strategies little and often is important. Do not wait until you feel the need, make these tools a good health habit.



Communication

For early humans learning to communicate was hugely important. It helped them work together, and most importantly, this helped them survive. Even today, humans are still very much “social animals”, meaning we all need to rely on others sometimes. This makes communication a very important skill, and one we need to use regularly in our daily lives.

Communication is how we:

- Share and explain our “internal” experiences, like physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, needs, wants, and opinions.
- Let others understand:
 - What we do or do not want them to do.
 - How they are helping or not helping us.
 - If we are satisfied or not with what is happening.
- Connect with others and strengthen the relationships which are most valuable to us.



Communication is the main way we can ensure our most basic human needs are met.
(Especially our needs for safety, control & connection)

Communication & Pain:

There are lots of reasons why communication skills become even more important when dealing with chronic pain:

Can you think of and write down some of the ways communication has been important, both good and bad, in your chronic pain journey so far?

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Some of the reasons we hear from our patients are...

- We could be more likely to need help from others. This makes it more likely we have to explain our difficulties and needs, and what help we may or may not want.
- We may find it harder to do everything we wish we could with, or for, other people.
- Chronic pain is a complex experience, which others without chronic pain may find hard to understand.
- We can also find it hard to explain our chronic pain experiences, especially when feeling the impacts physically and mentally ourselves.

- We may not even want to talk about our pain with others, either because we do not want to focus on it, or because it has been hard making others understand in the past.
- This can make it feel even harder staying connected with others, or making sure we get what we need or want out of life.

These communication problems combined can make chronic pain feel even more isolating and challenging. However, LESS communication is never the answer to the problems above. If our needs or difficulty are greater, we need to communicate MORE, not less.

Why can communicating with others can be trickier than we think?

We have talked on the course about lots of things which make it harder for us to function well in general with chronic pain, and especially to self-manage our pain successfully. These factors also impact communication:

- We may notice that discomfort about communicating with others makes us avoid it.
- We may find thoughts or emotions pull us away from communicating.
- We can forget our values and why it might be most important for us to discuss or share things with others.

Take a moment to look through the list above. Which of these barriers, if any, do you think might apply to what you find difficult about communicating about your chronic pain?

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What does good communication look like?

To make communication easier for ourselves, it would be helpful to learn and remember what good communication looks like. We have talked a lot about the importance of “balance” throughout the course, and good communication is no different!



We can think of how we communicate as ranging along a “spectrum”, from “Passive” to “Aggressive”. The “sweet spot” in the middle, is to communicate “assertively”. Doing so maximises the chance of what you say being heard.

Let’s think about why this is, by thinking about what each communication “style” looks like:

<u>Passive</u>	<u>Assertive</u>	<u>Aggressive</u>
Speaking quietly, not being heard.	Talking <i>and</i> listening.	Speaking loudly, talking over others.
Making self-small, hunched, staying still, lack of eye contact.	Relaxed / comfortable posture, facing forward, gentle eye contact.	Making self-big & imposing, more sudden movements or hand gestures, Fixed, intimidating eye contact.

As we can see - each communication style looks different. We have probably all experienced each of these styles from other people. Which of these styles would you prefer people tried if they were speaking to you?

It is also likely there are times we have found it easier or harder communicating in a more “balanced” or assertive way ourselves. **Remember – this is normal!**

There are lots of reasons we or others don’t always feel able to communicate in the most “balanced” way. To understand why, it can be helpful to think about what might be behind people communicating in these different ways.

Different communication styles are usually motivated by different aims and underlying beliefs in the person doing the speaking:

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
“GIVE”	“COMPROMISE”	“TAKE”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritises others: • e.g. does not share own needs because of needing to “keep the peace” or “not be a bother” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritises Fairness: • e.g. tries to ensure their needs are met, while respecting and hearing other’s opinions and needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritises themselves • e.g. tries to control situations, demand their needs are met first.
Beliefs		
Speaker thinks their needs do not matter.	Speaker can appreciate both their and other’s needs matter.	Speaker thinks other people’s needs do not matter.

We might find, that when we are trying to communicate, we might “tip” more to one side of the “passive – aggressive” see-saw than others. Do you identify with any of the beliefs or aims above?

You might also have noticed that when you are trying to communicate with others, they can also be “off-balance”, more passive or aggressive.

This brings us to one of the most important points about communication:

IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO!



If **EITHER** person trying to communicate is “off-balance”, the chances of successful communication go down, and the chances of stress and difficulty communicating go up.

How to “tip the balance back” - tips for good communication:

Preparation:

- **Clarify** for yourself what you want or need before speaking to others.
- **Be specific** - Vague needs are difficult to meet.
- **Practice** even roughly what you might want to say, or what you might hope to get from the conversation.
- **REMEMBER** - we can't control others or guarantee how they will respond
- **Be prepared** to think about what you might do if communication becomes “imbalanced” for you or who you are speaking to
 - e.g. repeating yourself, walking away if necessary.

Timing:

- **Pick your moment** – ask first if you or the person you want to speak to seem able to have a balanced conversation?
- **ASK** the other person first if they are happy to speak (e.g. *Is it ok if we talk about X just now?*)
- **AGREE** in advance a time-out or strategy in case things don't go anywhere useful (e.g. take a break and resume after 30 minutes)

Presentation: - Speaking in the way most likely to be heard:

- Be direct and honest
- Stick to facts
- Focus on one issue at a time

- Use “I” statements (e.g. “*I feel worried when you...*”)
- Avoid “you” statements (e.g. “*You are stressing me out!*”)
- Make sure there’s time for both people to speak
- What is said is not always what is heard:
 - Regularly check you understand the other person
 - e.g. “can I just check, you are saying...?”
 - Calmly repeat yourself or clarify if this could be useful:
 - e.g. “Just to be clear, I am saying... I am not saying...”
- Try to match your verbal and non-verbal communication
 - Imagine how it looks when the two do not line up
 - e.g. someone angrily or tearfully saying “I am fine”

When communication still feels difficult:

Many of the tips you have learned about managing mental discomfort or physical activity can also be applied to communication, to help us move **towards** having important conversations, instead of **away** from them

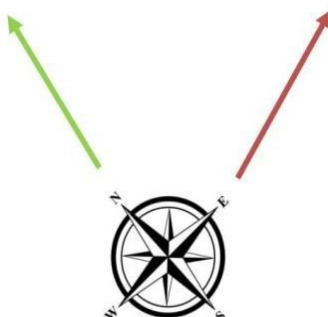
TOWARDS WHAT HELPS

Getting “unhooked” on unhelpful thoughts (e.g. being more mindful, using cognitive defusion or thought challenging techniques)

- **Realistic expectations** (e.g. remembering we are only ever ONE HALF of a conversation, breaking down complex issues into smaller conversations)

- **Approaching Discomfort** (Acknowledging some conversations can be uncomfortable, but important to have).

- **Connecting with our values** (Think about how open and honest communication could help strengthen valuable relationships, or how communicating could help you



AWAY FROM WHAT HELPS

- **Getting “hooked” on unhelpful thoughts** (e.g. “They won’t understand”, “I don’t like asking for help”, “What is the point of saying anything?”)

- **Unhelpful expectations** (expecting ourselves to “push on” without needing help sometimes, expecting others to know what we need without telling them)

- **Avoidance** (putting off important conversations because of any possible short-term discomfort this may cause)

- **Being disconnected from our values** (forgetting why it is important to us to have

What changes to the way you communicate do you think you could try?

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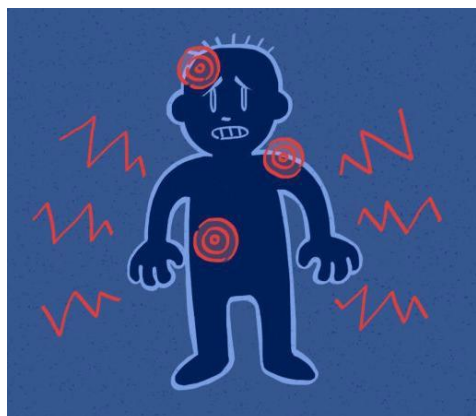
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Key points:

- ▶ To communicate well, we can try to **balance** how we communicate with others or **communicate “assertively”** - This means clearly and calmly expressing what you want without either being too passive or too aggressive.
- ▶ Communicating well is always a **balance** between **at least two people**:
- ▶ Learning to communicate assertively **doesn’t guarantee** you will have your needs met but it makes it **more likely**. It can also **improve your relationships** with other people.
- ▶ It is normal to find communication tricky sometimes, but skills we have already learned so far can help with this.

Flare up management



Flare ups are common when living with chronic pain. They can be very hard to cope with and cause a lot of distress. It is not likely that you can learn to avoid flare ups all together, but with pain management skills you may be able to...

- understand flare ups, making them less scary
- shorten flare ups
- help flare ups to be less severe or overwhelming
- learn more ways to cope during an episode.

What do we mean by a flare up?

When we talk about flare ups in the pain management service we mean an episode of increased pain, that has a beginning and an end, where you feel much worse than on a normal 'bad' day. Of course when a flare up ends, there is still pain present, but people tell us that, in time, pain will return to a level that is more normal for you. Flare ups can last hours, days, weeks or possibly months. However many months of increased pain is something different to a flare up and the advice we discuss here may not be so helpful.

What causes your pain to flare up?

Common causes include changes of routine, unexpected events, overactivity, illness and stress. Many people report that some flare ups seem to come from no where. There are so many factors that can make a difference to pain levels. Some of these factors involve internal changes to the body that we are unaware of. There can also be a delay between something aggravating happening, and feeling worse. These factors make it hard to understand all the reasons why your pain flares up. But it often helps to make sense of them as much as you can.

Make a note here of anything that you have noticed causing a flare up of your pain.

How do flare ups feel?

Here are some of the ways that flare ups have been described to us in the pain management service.

It's like my body shuts down, I struggle to think clearly, to take in what others are saying or to get my words out.

Frightening. I worry that this will not settle and that my pain will always be this bad.

I feel more sensitive to sound and light.

My fatigue gets much worse.

My pain spreads to other parts of my body.

My pain changes and becomes nastier and harder to cope with.

I feel sick, weak, shaky.

I sometimes feel scared that this terrible pain means there is something more serious wrong, something may have been missed.

My mood really goes down.

I constantly dread when the next one will come along.

Movement becomes very difficult.

I can't settle or get my body comfortable.

I feel like hiding away from others.

Make a note here about how flare ups feel for you.



Remember that feeling pain is like having an alarm going off in the body. This alarm is super protective of your safety. As pain becomes chronic the sensitivity in the alarm system increases, meaning it is triggered more easily and reacts louder and more quickly. Flare ups happen when something has triggered this sensitive system, without you being really in danger.

How can I be sure I am not in danger?

This is a very good question. It is natural to worry when you are feeling so unwell. How do you know that what you are feeling is due to a chronic pain flare up, rather something new and more worrying? Asking yourself the following questions can help...

- Is the pain a worse version of your usual pain?
- Have you had a flare up like this before that passed in time?
- Have you injured yourself in any way?
- Have you got other, new, symptoms of being unwell for example a temperature, vomiting or being unable to pass urine?

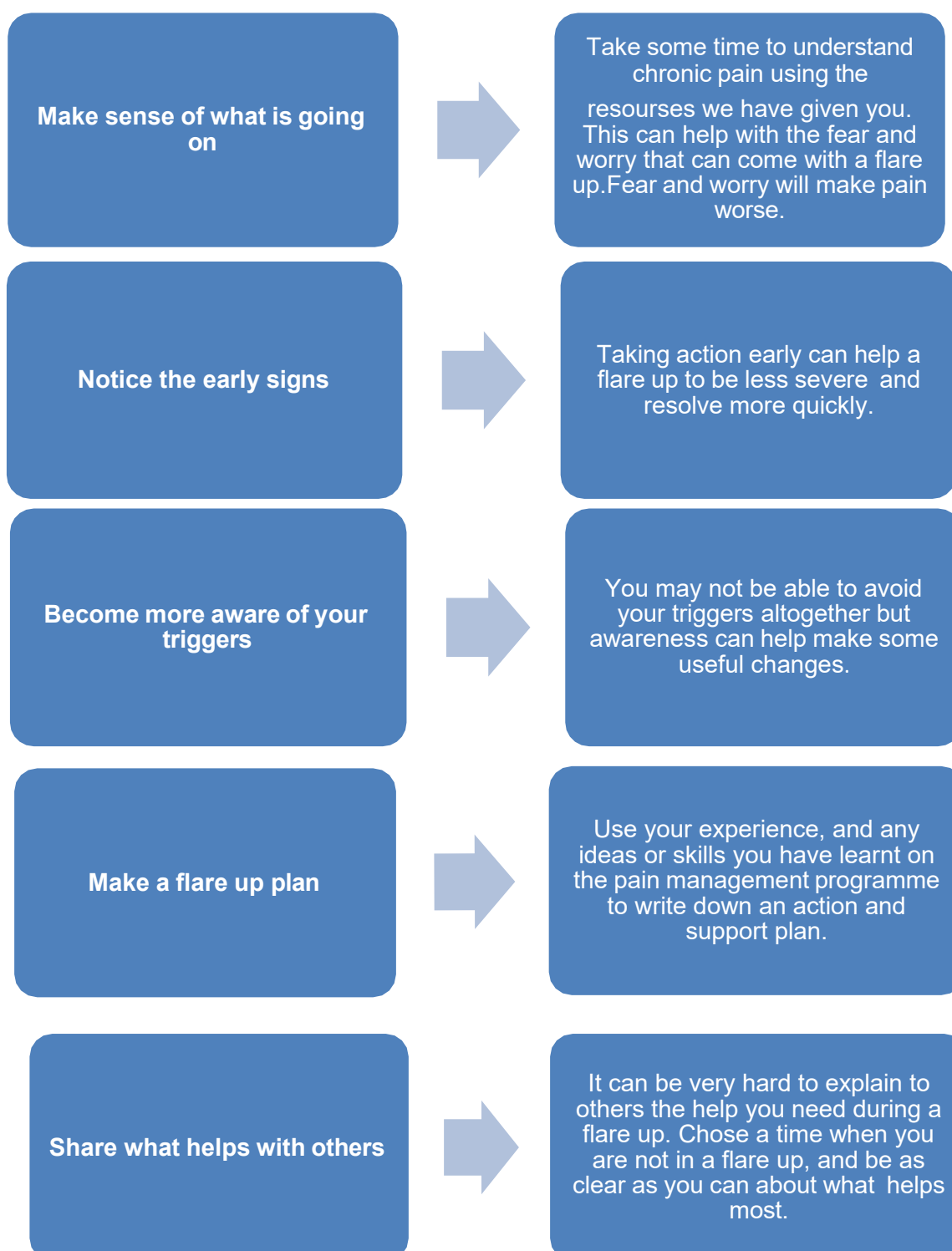
If you have experienced episodes like this before, and have not injured yourself recently, it is likely a pain flare up rather than something new. However, if after thinking about these questions, you are worried, or do feel this is strange, new, or different it is the right thing to seek medical advice.



Key point: Having chronic pain does not mean that nothing else can ever be wrong with your health. It is ok to ask for medical advice if you are worried about new symptoms.

What can help?

If flare ups are a problem for you, consider taking these steps...



Making a flare up plan

An awareness of first aid, guides us to the action to take when things go wrong. It might help to think about a flare up as needing a first aid plan, and one that is personal to you.

Flare ups can be difficult to think about, when they are over you may just want to move on.

However, your experience of past flare ups is what can help you most in the future.

Chose a time when you are not in a flare up to consider:

- What has helped you most in the past?
- What new ideas from the pain management programme could you try out next time?
- How can others help you most?
- Is there any advice you could ask for now, that may help you during the next flare up?
- What is the best position for you to rest?
- How often is it helpful to move?
- What is the most helpful thing to try first?
- How often does it help to get up and move?
- What could comfort you during the flare up?
- How can you pass the time, where is it best to put your attention?
- Are there any comforting movements or exercises?
- Are there any medication changes that would be helpful?
- What words or phrases would you find comforting?
- What practical problems do you face, e.g. caring responsibilities, and can you make a plan for how you will cope.



See an example of flare up plan on the next page. You could use this table or make your own. Think about where you keep your plan. Share it with others if you can. After you next flare up take time to look back and make a note of what worked well, or less well. Each flare up you have can move you closer to the best coping plan.



Key points: Flare ups can be helped by understanding what they mean, knowing your triggers, acting quickly to help yourself, making a flare up plan and getting the support of others.

Flare up plan		
Think about?	What this means for me?	How did that go?
First steps to take		
What might help my pain		
Others can help me by		
How can I communicate about how I am feeling		
What will comfort me most		
How can I pass the time		
Any comforting or reassuring thoughts		
Any medication changes		
What is the best balance of movement and rest		
What practical steps can I take to make life easier during a flare up		
What signs can I look out for that the flare up is passing		

A Flare up box

Consider having a box, drawer or electronic folder where you keep things useful in a flare up.

Make sure that others know where you keep it. Could it contain?

- Music you want to hear.
- Familiar films that may hold you interest without using too much energy.
- Photos.
- Heat or ice pack.
- Favourite smells or textures to comfort.
- Relaxation downloads.
- Easy snack foods.
- Post it's with reassuring words or phrases.



What have other's said.....

I like peace and quiet for a bit, and then maybe a hot bath.

Talking to my partner about what they can do to help has meant I feel less powerless and scared during my flare up.

Being with my pet is really comforting when the pain is bad.

Rest is helpful but if I lie too long I feel sorer. I set an alarm to remind me to get up and move.

I remind myself that I have been here before, and I will get through it.

I keep one drawer in the freezer just for flare up food.

Breathing exercises can be really helpful.

I asked my friend to pick up the kids from school if I text her the word flare.

I have explained to my family that quiet helps me to recover so now they don't try and chat when my flare up kicks in.

I find it helps not to blame myself for the flare up; it is a normal part of being in chronic pain.

I look out for anxious thoughts during a flare up, label them and try not to stay with.

I like a hot water bottle and a familiar TV series on low in the background.

Because I have reduced my usual medication, I can take a little more when I have a flare up and it helps a bit.

Communicating about a flare up

It can often be hard to explain to others that you are having a flare up. Some people find that organising a nonverbal way to send an agreed signal about what kind of day you are having can be useful. You could do this by wearing something different, attaching something to the door or fridge, standing it on a desk or sending it electronically. Once you agree what that image should be, you can discuss what it means. For example, here are some ideas that others on pain management programmes have suggested.

'When we see the red traffic light fridge magnet, we know that mum has not been able to cook and we need to look in the freezer for tonight's tea'

'When I am wearing my noise cancelling headphones in the office it means I am having a bad day and prefer not to chat'

'When I send a red flag emoji to my friends, they know why I have not been able to call them back this week'



Key Point: Preparation and communication can both help to reduce the stress of a flare up, which may make a difference to how you feel.

Moving on with pain management

As you come to the end of the pain management programme. Pause and think about what you have gained, consider making some notes in the boxes below.....



**Gentle
movement**

Mindfulness

**Recognising
your values**

Pacing

Sleep

Managing flare

**Defusing from
unhelpful thoughts**

**Understanding
chronic pain**

Communicatio

**Making
changes with**

**Setting
achievable**

**Spending
more time
doing what**

Meditation

What has felt helpful to you on the PMP?

What have you found most challenging about the PMP?

How did you cope with these challenges?

What are your values? Make a note of them here so they can guide you in planning your next steps.

What is next for you?

Look at the notes you have made about what you have found helpful during this programme. Use this information to set some goals for yourself. For example:

- If you wrote 'breathing exercises' a goal might be to set some time aside several times a day for a short practice.
- If you wrote 'talking to others about how I am feeling' think about what else could offer you that feeling of connection with others, and the chance to talk.

Setting small, helpful goals can be a good way to keep working on pain management now that the weekly sessions are coming to an end. Set a goal that you are more likely to achieve

by considering these steps. Let's say talking to others more regularly is something that I think will help me if I can continue now that the group is ending.

Be specific about what you are going to do.

Talking to others is too general to be a goal. Exactly how am I going to do this? A more specific goal could be Walk to my friend's house twice a week

Think about what could get in the way.

Consider what you will do if it's raining, or your friend has other plans.

Be flexible.

What else could you do that involves connecting with others?

Be realistic

How far away is my friend's house? Is this a distance I can manage now? Pick something that is achievable now.

Set a time to start.

Tuesday afternoon at 2, I will check with my friend that this will work



Key point: Values are an important guide to setting goals and moving forwards despite pain.

What can help as the programme comes to an end?

- Think about what you have achieved so far
- Expect setbacks
- Involve others
- Seek out support
- Be flexible, adjust goals as needed
- Make time for pain management
- Rewards can help

What's out there?

It can help to look around you, what is happening in your local community that might feel supportive or useful for you now? Look at the information pack we have given you and consider.....

- Support groups
- Hobbies and interests
- Exercise groups
- Get support with areas of stress
- Learn a new skill
- Support with mental health
- Volunteering or work opportunities



Key point:

- Improving your quality of life can help pain become a less central part of daily life.
- Could attending this group programme be the start of getting more help and support for
- yourself, where can you get this support?
- Attending this group is just the start. New skills take time to build.

PMP Session Journal:

As you go through the PMP, you can use the following pages to keep track of your progress and learning.

There is a page for each group session. Each page has space to note down what you might personally want to focus on trying to put into practice, based on what you have learned.

There is also space to think about what you might change or try differently.

Remember, when learning new skills it is normal and expected that we need to try things out and see how they go.

Noting down our successes, challenges, and any changes we make, can help us be clear on what is working best for us. It can also help us keep track of how best to keep moving forward with our goals, in line with what matters most to us.

Week 1:

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 2:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 3:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 4:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 5:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 6:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 7:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 8:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What is a goal you can work on for next week?

What value does this line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make your goal more achievable?

Week 9:

How did you get on with last week's goal?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What are some goals you can work on from now until the 3-month review?

What values do these line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make these goals more achievable?

3-month Review Session:

How did you get on since the end of the weekly part of the PMP?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What are some goals you can work on from now until the 6-month review?

What values do these line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make these goals more achievable?

6-month Review – Final Session:

How did you get on since the 3-month review session?

What successes or challenges did you notice?

Is there anything you would do differently in future?

What are some goals you can continue to work towards in the future?

What values do these line up with for you?

What steps can you take to make these goals more achievable?