

# Persistent Pain

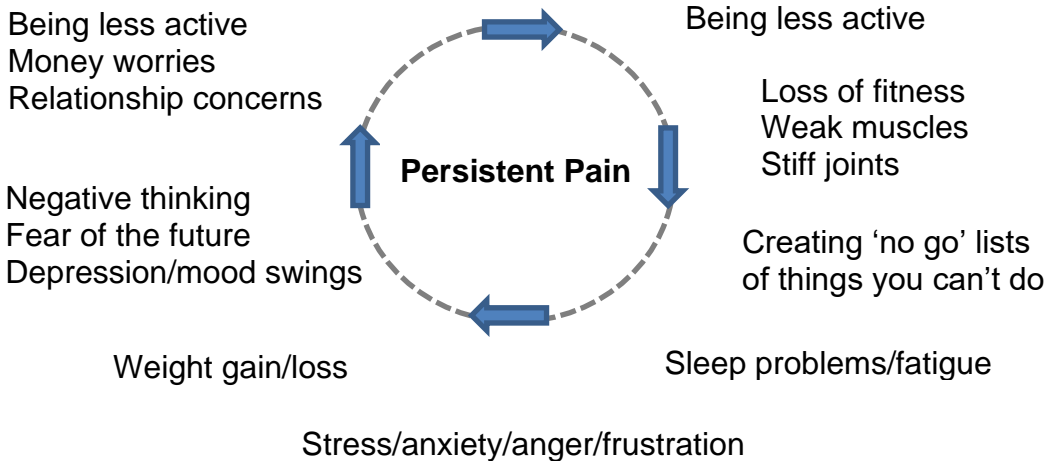
## Physiotherapy Patient Information Leaflet

### What is persistent pain?

**Persistent pain** may also be referred to as 'long term pain'. It is a pain which has persisted for some time after the normal healing process has taken place. The pain is called persistent when it has been present for longer than 12 weeks, and may last many months or years without a clear reason for why the pain is present. When pain has been present for a long time, changes occur within the nervous system. These changes affect the way our brain interprets messages from other parts of our body. As a result, our pain system becomes over sensitised and things such as light touch are often perceived as painful. When this happens, often normal activities will produce pain.

### The persistent pain cycle

The experience of persistent pain is complex and affects us in many ways.



A common misconception of pain is that pain means harm, therefore we tend to avoid activities which may cause the pain for fear of causing further injury or harm to our bodies.

This is often referred to as **fear avoidance**.

Avoiding moving or doing an activity because of the pain is an **unhelpful** response. It can contribute to the pain persisting for longer and may actually make the intensity of pain even worse. With a lack of activity our bodies will naturally become stiffer and weaker; this is known as **deconditioning**, which in turn leads to further pain as we are able to do less.

## How can feelings and thoughts affect your pain?

Everything we do and feel has an emotional and physical element. All physical sensations we experience in our body are processed within our brain, and our response to those sensations is linked to our thoughts, feelings and experiences of those sensations.

Pain is usually associated with harm or threat to our body, and it's our body's way of reducing that threat by causing a physical reaction to the amount of pain we might feel.

An example of this is if you touch something hot with your hand, you feel pain and your response is to move away from the heat and cool the hand down to prevent further injury.

**OUCH!**

After the initial response, the amount of pain or discomfort we feel can be influenced by our thoughts of how serious the injury might be. These thoughts and feelings about the pain can be complex and based on many factors, such as previous experience, concern about the injury, fear, reactions from other people, and experience of others with a similar problem.



### **Boom and bust cycle**

Another response to persistent pain may be to push on through the pain until it feels impossible to carry on. This will then usually be followed by a prolonged period of inactivity to recover. Whilst it is important to carry on with certain activities even if there is some pain, pushing on until the pain is unbearable resulting in this period of inactivity, will lead to the deconditioning cycle again.



### **Poor sleep**

Good quality sleep is necessary for the body to restore itself from the stresses and strains of normal everyday life.

Persistent pain can interfere with the normal sleep pattern making it difficult to get to sleep or disturbing sleep during the night. This leads to poor quality, unrefreshing sleep, which in turn can adversely affect our pain mechanisms and lower pain thresholds. In fact, individuals who have poor sleep quality are thought to be more likely to develop persistent pain conditions. This is another factor that can lead to the deconditioning cycle.



### **Low mood and poor self esteem**

Due to pain and poor sleep, many people experience 'low mood', feeling unmotivated to join in with normal activities which can lead to social isolation and poor self-esteem. Again, these are factors which are known to feed into the persistent pain cycle and the downwards deconditioning spiral.

## **So how can I help myself if I have persistent pain?**

The good news is that there are many skills and tools that can be helpful in improving the outlook for you.



You may not need to use all the tools and skills suggested, just see what works best for you.

## Acceptance

Acceptance is the first and most important tool in self-management of persistent pain. Acceptance is not about giving up, but recognising that you need to take more control. It's a bit like opening a door that will allow you in to lots of self-managing opportunities to make life a bit easier for you. The key to opening this door is your willingness to see and try to do things a bit differently.

## Pacing

The idea of pacing is to create a balance between activity and rest to reduce the 'highs and lows' of day to day symptoms. With pacing, it is important that if you are experiencing a 'bad day', a **base line of activity** is maintained, and that on a 'good day', you do not push things too far to make up for the 'lost time' when you were in a lot of pain. This is the 'boom and bust' cycle mentioned earlier.

The base line is the amount of activity you keep up on a regular, daily basis without causing a 'flare up' with the pain. An activity/pain diary can be a useful tool to help find your personal baseline.

## Graded activity/exercise

It is important to maintain a level of activity or exercise in order to prevent and improve deconditioning. The amount of activity varies from person to person.

Once a base line of activity has been achieved, as described above, a graded exercise/activity approach can be adopted whereby an exercise which is tolerated by the individual is introduced, such as five minutes walking each day. This activity is then gradually increased at a rate to suit the individual.



It is useful to set some **goals** to work towards. One example of this may be walking to collect the daily newspaper from a local shop. If the shop is a 15 minute walk away, that would be a total of 30 minutes walking to fetch the paper and get back home. To build up to this, it might be a good idea to start with a walk of 10 minutes (i.e. walk five minutes from home, turn around and go back) each day for about two weeks. After that, the walk would be gradually increased by a few minutes each week, until the goal of 30 minutes is reached, enabling you to fetch the newspaper and get back home. Having goals **keeps you motivated** and lets you see how much you've achieved.

## Sleep hygiene

In order to maintain a good sleeping pattern and better quality of sleep, it is important to avoid poor sleeping habits and adopt good ones. This is known as **sleep hygiene**, and it is important for helping maintain the body's natural sleep cycle.

It is better to maintain a regular time you go to bed and get up each day, whatever the pain is like. If you have had a bad night's sleep, it is best to avoid sleeping in the day.

If sleeping in the day becomes a regular thing, it can interfere with the normal sleep cycle and make it difficult to sleep at night or result in poor quality sleep. Maintaining a good sleep pattern can help improve feelings of low mood. Exercise can also be helpful in promoting better quality sleep and improving mood and self-esteem.



## Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

CBT helps by looking into and challenging the individual's thoughts and perceptions of their pain.

Certain thoughts and perceptions may have an adverse effect on the body and a person's ability to cope with long term illness and pain.

CBT aims to give you a different way of looking at various aspects of your condition, and offers **coping strategies** to deal with difficulties in a more positive way, thus improving quality of life. See below for how to access CBT in Dudley.

## Medication

Pain relief medication may be prescribed by your GP to help manage the pain. However with long term pain, the effectiveness of commonly prescribed medications for pain relief can vary. This is something which would need to be discussed with the GP for the appropriate use of pain relief medication on an individual basis.

## Meditation/relaxation/mindfulness

These terms all have the same purpose really; it's just a case of setting aside time to focus on the here and now, rather than the past or the future. This could be as simple as five minutes of focusing on relaxed breathing to create the balance between mind and body.

Making time to relax and enjoy your favourite things is also really important, despite having persistent pain. For example, meeting up with friends, reading a book, spending time outdoors in the fresh air; whatever you enjoy doing will help to improve your overall general wellbeing and a feeling that you are in control.



## Who can help?

A variety of health care professionals may be involved in the care of someone with persistent pain.

- GPs can prescribe medication, arrange any necessary investigations and help to access other health care services.
- Physiotherapists can help with specific musculoskeletal problems and also guide you through a graded exercise programme to help improve and maintain fitness.

- Psychologists may be involved in helping optimise coping strategies and may offer CBT in an individual or group situation. Dudley Talking Therapies provides CBT and you can self-refer (see below under “Further Support”)
- Occupational therapists can help with activities of daily living and assess for any equipment which may be necessary in order to maintain independence.
- Specialist consultants who specialise in pain management may be involved in the management of a patient with persistent pain. This could be an orthopaedic consultant, a rheumatologist or an anaesthetist.
- Pain management teams who specialise in persistent pain management and have various healthcare professionals such as consultants in pain medicine, anaesthetists, specialist nurses, clinical psychologists and physiotherapists working alongside each other.

## Further support

### Useful videos to help with persistent pain

Google: Understanding pain: what to do about it in less than 5 minutes

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_3phB93rvI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_3phB93rvI)

Google: Patient story: Jack with Peter O’Sullivan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4gmtpdwmrs>

Google: Tame the beast – time to rethink persistent pain

<https://vimeo.com/212350345>

Google: The truth about back pain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZumxS6DX-5o>

### Websites to help with persistent pain

<https://www.retrainpain.org/course492678/>

Free online course for patients with persistent pain



<http://www.backincontrol.com/the-4-stages/>

Developed by a spinal surgeon

<http://www.paintoolkit.org/>

Also app available

Living with pain-Live well NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/pain](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/pain)

Living with long-term pain: a guide to self-management

[www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)

British Pain Society

[www.britishpainsociety.org](http://www.britishpainsociety.org)

### **Sleep advice**

Lots of really useful advice and downloadable Sleep Advice Fact Sheet:

<http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk>

### **Self help tools for relaxation**

<http://psychology.tools/>

<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>

### **Self-referral for CBT**

Contact Dudley Talking Therapies via their website

<http://dwmh.nhs.uk> or on Freephone 0800 9530404 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 4.30pm, excluding Bank Holidays)

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact the clinician who gave you this leaflet.

Russells Hall Hospital: 01384 456111 ext. 2231

Corbett Hospital: 01384 456111 ext. 4670

Community Physiotherapy: 01384 321605

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/physiotherapy/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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