

Flare ups and pain

Information for you



Many people with long-term pain will experience flare ups. These are a **normal** part of having persistent pain and are not a sign of new injury or damage.

It is common for pain to flare-up even though you have been pacing, building up your activities and exercises gradually and practising relaxation. This can be very frustrating, and make you feel like you have little control over your pain. It can be hard not to give up completely and stop everything you have learnt. However, giving up and resting causes our bodies to get more physically out of condition and to be less able to cope with activity.

Why?

Consider why you have had a flare up. Have you had some stress in your life? Are you sleeping poorly?

Some people have found that a particular activity causes their pain to flare up. Could you do it differently to stop this happening? This could be as simple as breaking the activity down into smaller steps (see the handout on Managing activity) or planning how you will do it.

However, for many people with persistent pain, flare ups just happen. Don't blame yourself. Pain, like life, isn't smooth sailing.

The most important thing is to manage the flare-up while it lasts. This will help you get back on track sooner. Other people with persistent pain have told us that staying positive helps.

"I have been here before and know it will go"

"I know I haven't reinjured myself"

"I can manage this"

"I know what works"

Flare up plan

It is important to make a flare up plan when you are well. When you are sore or tired it is difficult to think about what you should do. These are our top tips:

- Reduce your activities and exercises slightly but do not stop them altogether. Only rest for short periods of time. Break activities down into smaller chunks and pace them throughout the day.

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- If at all possible avoid bed rest, otherwise you will lose some of your fitness. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your family, friends or work colleagues. Remember this is only temporary and as the flare up settles you will gradually get back to your normal level of activity.
- Practice your relaxation. Introduce several sessions into your day. Use distraction - pleasant things like talking to a friend or listening to music can help shift attention away from pain.
- Increase your medication as agreed with your doctor. Cut down again as the flare up settles. Heat pads, warm baths or showers can be helpful.

Flare ups and pain as part of a series of reliable, evidence-based advice to support you along the way to improving your function and quality of life, with pain.

Further information is available from:

Pain Association Scotland - see the video on flare ups www.painassociation.com

Scottish Chronic Pain Steering Group www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/pain.aspx

Pain Concern www.painconcern.org.uk