



A guide for patients in chronic pain



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What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is usually defined as:

- pain that continues for more than 3 months after the usual recovery period for an illness or injury,
- or
- pain that goes on over months or years as a result of a chronic condition.

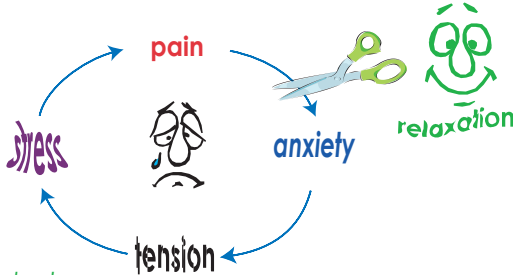


Chronic pain affects millions of people in the UK, so you're not alone. It can have a huge impact on your quality of life, and can also affect the lives of your family and those around you.

This booklet discusses a number of techniques that can help you to manage your pain more effectively. By using these techniques and making them part of your daily routine, we hope you will be able to gain control of your pain, making life more pleasurable and rewarding.

Relaxation

Learning to relax is really important when it comes to managing your pain. Anxiety, tension and stress can make the pain worse. Also, the pain itself can lead to anxiety, tension and stress, so it's like a vicious circle. The trick is to break this cycle and relaxation can help you to do this.



Getting started

It sounds easy, but learning to relax takes time. You have to practise every day. Don't be too ambitious when you first start - it's best not to try the techniques if you're having a really bad day, as they probably won't work. However, as you get better at relaxing, you will be able to use the techniques when you are having a bad day, and you will even be able to practise when you're out and about, standing in a queue, sitting in the car, etc. You might find it useful to keep a relaxation diary - make a note of the type of relaxation exercise you did, when and where you did it, and how it felt. This diary should help you to see an improvement in your relaxation skills.

A quickie!

Use this quick, simple relaxation exercise whenever you feel tense. You can use it anytime, any place - when you're sitting down or even in crowded places.

- Take one good, deep breath.
- Keep breathing slowly and deeply.
- Let your shoulders droop.
- Relax your hands.

One for your muscles

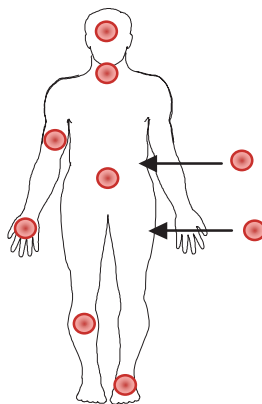
This exercise takes about 10 minutes. Try to practise it as often as possible - once a day if you can.

Step 1. Get prepared

- Find somewhere quiet. You might like to play some soothing music.
- Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down (on your front, back or side). Make yourself comfortable, e.g. you might want to bend your knees.
- Close your eyes and breathe deeply.
- Relax your body - let it go all loose and floppy.

Step 2. Relax your muscles

- As you breathe in and out, relax all the major muscle groups in turn.
- Start with your feet. Is there any tension? If there is, release it and relax - and at the same time, say 'my feet feel calm and relaxed'. Do this three times, then move up to your calves, bottom, and so on.



1. feet
2. calves
3. bottom
4. back
5. tummy
6. hands
7. arms
8. neck
9. face and neck

Do Steps 1 and 2 **three** times



Calm your thoughts

Stay fully relaxed, and breathe slowly and regularly. Distract your mind by thinking about a relaxing, pleasant scene or playing some soothing music.



For example, imagine that you are in the countryside on a sunny summer afternoon. Imagine that you are slowly walking on your own through a field ... you can feel the warmth of the sun streaming down from the blue sky. You can see the grass, the trees and the flowers in the field.

You can hear the birds singing, and in the distance you can hear children's voices. Feel the ground beneath you as you walk, and walk slowly, looking at everything around you. Think about what you can see, hear, smell and touch. Focus all your thoughts on this scene, and remove any other thoughts or worries that may come to mind.



Spend **five** **5** minutes fully relaxed physically and mentally.

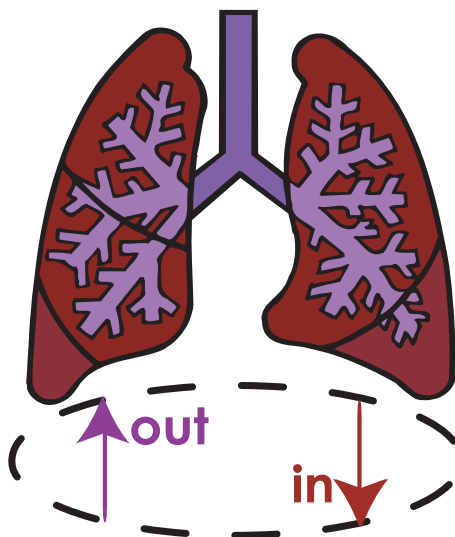
When you want to get up, count backwards from four to one. You will hopefully feel refreshed, wide awake and calm. Keep this feeling with you when you carry on with your daily routine, and don't rush around too fast. Stay as calm as possible.

And finally...

You can practise any of the exercises described above on your own, but why not consider joining a yoga or gentle movement group? For example, Dru Yoga is particularly suitable for people with pain or disabilities.

Diaphragmatic breathing

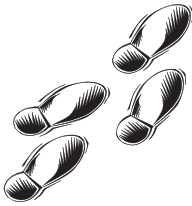
The way that you breathe is very important when you are in pain. This may sound strange, as breathing is something we don't usually think about! However, when you are in pain, your breathing may be shallow or you may find that you are holding your breath. This can lead to tension. As we discussed in the section on relaxation (Pages 2 - 4), tension can make your pain worse. The trick is to take time to think about your breathing, making sure it is slow and relaxed. The exercise described below can help you do this.



Your diaphragm is a band of muscle that sits just below your lungs. It helps you to breathe by moving up and down, forcing air in and out of the lungs. Normally, this happens spontaneously, you don't have to think about it. However, there is a technique called 'diaphragmatic breathing', in which you deliberately use your diaphragm to control your breathing. To try it, follow the steps on the next page.

- Start off by making sure that you are comfortable.
- Make sure that your back is well supported and put one hand on your upper chest and the other on your tummy.
- Now close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- Notice how quickly you are breathing and try to slow it down.
- Take a long, slow, relaxed breath in through your nose. Push out your tummy (this helps your lungs to fill up) and feel the air gliding slowly down in to your lungs.
- Hold it there for a few seconds, then slowly breathe out again through your mouth, with your lips slightly parted. Let your tummy fall - this helps get rid of the air from your lungs.
- Take another long, slow breath in, pushing your tummy out, then breathe out, letting your tummy fall.
- Think about your neck and shoulders - is there any tension there? If there is, bring your shoulders up towards your ears, then slowly lower them back down, loosening any tension.
- Check for signs of tension in any other parts of your body.
- Focus on your breathing again, taking slow, relaxed breaths in through your nose and slow, relaxed breaths out through your mouth. Imagine the tension flowing away with every breath out.

Pacing



Pacing is a technique that you can use to gradually increase your level of activity.

How does it work?

If you have chronic pain, you might find that you have good days, when you can get on with things around the house or do something that you enjoy, and bad days, when you can do very little. As time goes on, some people find that they have fewer good days and more bad days.

Pacing is all about breaking this pattern and gradually increasing what you can do. It should be possible to pace any activity, although in everyday life, we are not used to doing things gradually - we like to get things done quickly. But pacing really does work!



How do I do it?

Start by choosing one or more activities that you want to be able to do, or be able to do for longer, e.g. walking, sitting, standing, etc. If it's the first time you've tried pacing, don't be too ambitious. Choose an activity that you find difficult, but not impossible.

Before you start, you need to work out your **baseline** time.

To do this:

- Make a note of how long you can **comfortably** do the activity for.
- Divide by **two**.

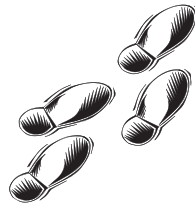
For example, if you choose walking as your activity, and you can comfortably walk for 5 minutes, your baseline time would be 2½ minutes. So, on your first few days, try to walk for 2½ minutes - it's important that you do this on your good days **and** your bad days. Then pace up to 3 or 4 minutes. After a few weeks, you should hopefully be able to walk for 10-15 minutes.



Remember

Never do more than you have planned

Practise pacing every day and write down your times on each occasion. This will help you to see how much you're improving.



And remember - pacing really does work because you stay motivated by continually achieving a series of small goals!

Goal setting

Chronic pain can affect lots of different aspects of your life. You may find that you have had to give up going places or doing things that you used to enjoy because you are afraid that this may make you feel worse. Also, it may be a little frightening to think about starting something new. Goal setting is rather like pacing - you can use it to gradually build up the activities that you do. It's all about putting you back in control of your pain, rather than letting the pain control you.



A goal is something that you would like to achieve. It may be going to the cinema, walking the dog, or playing with your children or grandchildren. There are many different kinds of goals and they can be either short- or long-term.

There are four golden rules for setting goals:

- The goal must be realistic.
- It must be something you can measure.
- It should be your own goal - don't let someone else pick it for you.
- Don't be too ambitious to start with - pick something that's important to you, but not impossible. Look beyond your pain to what's important in your life.

How do I set goals?

The first step is to decide on your goal. Then think about all the things you need to do to achieve that goal. It might help to write all this down on a piece of paper. Say, for example, that your goal is to start driving your car again. There are lots of things involved in this:

- Getting in and out of the car.
- Sitting in the driver's seat.
- Turning your head to look in the mirror.
- Twisting to put on your seat belt.
- Moving the pedals up and down.
- Leaning forward over the steering wheel.
- Pulling the handbrake on.
- Changing gear.
- Opening and closing the door.
- Concentrating on the road.
- Looking to the side as you pull out of a junction.

Now look at each of these things in turn - what do you have problems with? If, for example, you have a problem with sitting, you should start by gradually increasing the amount of time that you sit in the driver's seat. Use the pacing technique described on Pages 7 – 8 to do this. To start with, you might only be able to sit for a minute or two, but after a few weeks, you should hopefully be able to build this up to 15 minutes or so. You may also want to make practical changes, such as back supports and wider mirrors.

It's important to review your progress regularly - about once a week if you can - and re-think some of your methods if they're not working. Always remember that each small step is an achievement in itself, and that lots of small steps can help you take one big leap. Hopefully you'll be on your way back to a more active life.



Remember

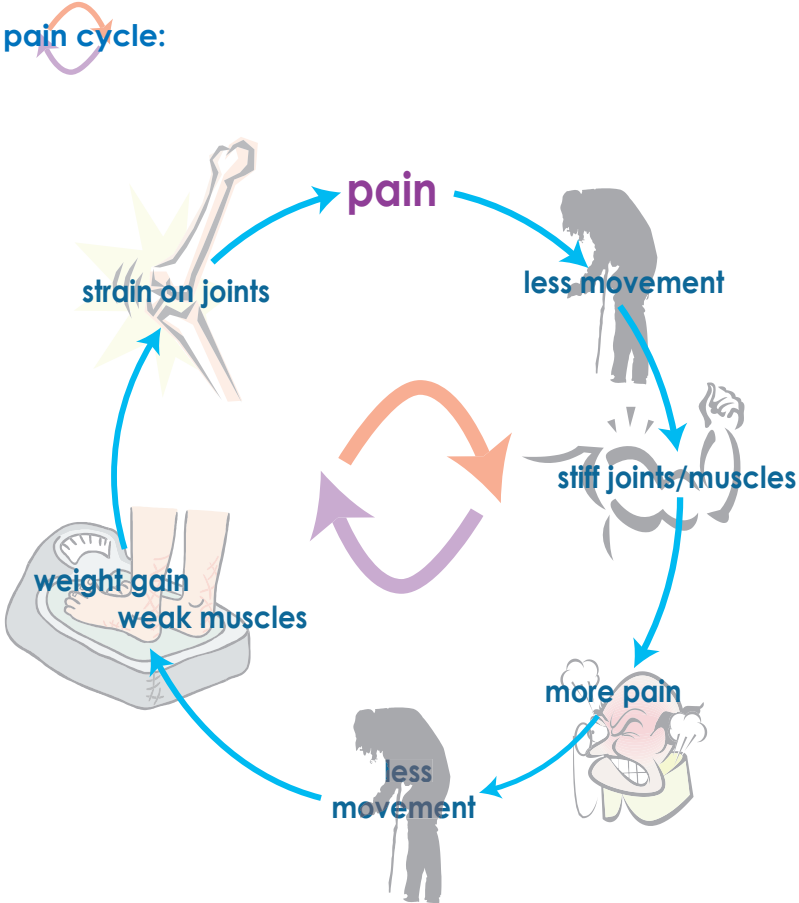


Always take time to enjoy your successes too

Exercise

When we experience acute pain, it makes us rest so that healing can take place. For example, if you sprained your wrist, the pain would stop you using it so that it could heal. However, with chronic pain, you may feel pain even if there is no injury and no healing. This pain causes you to avoid certain movements and activities, making your muscles and joints stiff. This, in turn, makes the pain worse - this is called the

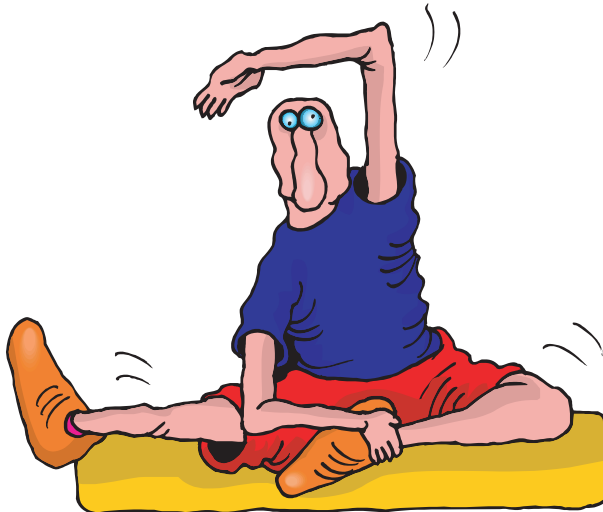
pain cycle:



If you have chronic pain, you may be afraid to do exercise. However, staying active, within realistic limits, can be very beneficial. It can:

- have a conditioning effect on your muscles and joints.
- improve your mobility.
- help your circulation.
- improve your general sense of well-being and staying power.
- improve your posture.
- help reduce the pain.

Remember - unused muscles feel more pain than toned flexible ones. Speak to your doctor or nurse about a modest exercise programme that you can do safely. As you build up your strength, you will be able to do more exercise.



Coping with flare-ups

From time to time, you may find that you experience periods of increased pain, sometimes called flare-ups.

Although these flare-ups don't usually last very long, they often come on quickly and without much warning, so they can be difficult to cope with. It may be tempting to go back to your old habits, like taking more medication or going to bed. Try not to do this.



Instead:

- Recognise what is happening.
- Don't panic.
- Take your medications regularly.
- Continue with the relaxation and breathing exercises described on Pages 2 - 6.
- If you are unable to continue with your exercises for a couple of days, start slowly and re-set your goals if you need to.
- Try to think positively - negative thoughts can make things worse.
- Be kind to yourself!
- If the flare-up carries on for more than a few days, contact your nurse or GP.

You might also find that preparing in advance for any flare-ups can really reduce your distress.

A guide to sleeping



Those with chronic pain often find that they have problems sleeping. You might find it difficult to get off to sleep, or find that you waken during the night because of your pain.

Unfortunately, the more you try to sleep, the harder it sometimes becomes. This can increase your stress levels, which can make the pain worse, which, in turn, makes it more difficult to sleep. So, it's like a vicious circle.

If this sounds familiar, try following the advice below:

- Try not to nap during the day, no matter how tired you feel - do something else instead.
- Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol and cigarettes for 4 hours before you go to bed.
- Wait until you feel tired before you go to bed.
- Be aware of the messages you give yourself about bedtime - don't go to bed expecting not to sleep!
- Try to go to bed at the same time each night.
- Do not read, eat or watch TV in bed.
- Make sure that your bed is comfortable - use pillows to support your legs and back.

- Use the relaxation and breathing exercises in bed (see Pages 2 - 6).
- If you can't get off to sleep, get up and do something, such as reading or relaxation exercises.
- Get up at the same time every morning, regardless of how much you slept during the night - set your alarm clock if you need to.



Remember



A good short sleep is better than
tossing and turning all night

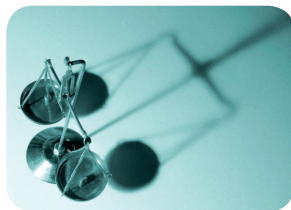
Managing Stress



As we discussed on Page 2, stress and tension can make your pain worse, so it's important that you learn how to cope with (or even avoid) stress. This involves knowing what it is and recognising when you are suffering from it.

What is stress?

In our day-to-day lives, each of us faces physical and emotional demands from our friends, family, work and so on. Most of the time, we can cope with these demands and there's no problem. However, stress occurs when we are unable to cope. As well as increasing the pain, this can make you quick-tempered, weepy, angry and frustrated. Chronic pain itself also causes stress.



How can I cope with it?

There are a number of ways of coping with stress. Some of these are listed below.

- Being able to relax. There are some relaxation exercises on Pages 2 - 4 that might help you with this.
- Having someone to confide in.
- Being able to find a practical solution to the problem, rather than worrying about it.
- Using the pacing techniques and breathing exercises described on Pages 5 - 8.

Assertiveness and communication

People with chronic pain sometimes lose their confidence, finding it hard to express their needs. If you don't express your needs clearly, this can increase your tension, which as you know, can increase your pain. So it's important to communicate well and to be assertive. You can do this by following the simple tips given below.

- Be firm and say what you mean.
- Try not to complain, plead or be apologetic.
- Don't shout or raise your voice, keep it calm and low.
- Make sure your message is clear, rather than expecting people to guess what you're getting at.
- Don't tell people what to do, but explain to them why you're asking them to do something.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- When you're asking for something, say 'I want' instead of 'I need' and 'I don't want' instead of 'I cannot'.
- Be precise and to the point - don't beat about the bush!

Remember



It's OK to change your mind and to say 'no' without feeling guilty - you're in control!

Taking your medication

Most patients with chronic pain will be taking some kind of medication. There are various different types of painkillers; the type that your doctor prescribes for you will be based on how bad your pain is.



Most painkillers are taken by mouth.

Tablets



Capsules



Liquids



However, some patients have difficulty swallowing, so there are other forms available. These include:

Suppositories

Injections

Creams

Patches



Some women may already be familiar with patches, as these have been used for many years for hormone replacement therapy (HRT). More recently, patches have also been introduced as a way of delivering painkillers. They're basically like a big plaster, which you stick on to the skin. The patch contains the painkiller, which is absorbed across the skin and into the bloodstream.



If you are taking medication for your pain, try to follow these **tips**:

- Ask your doctor to explain what the medication is, what it's for and how to take it. 
- Read the instructions on the pack or in the leaflet before you start taking your medication.
- **Always** take your medication when you are supposed to.
-  For example, if you have been told to take it three times a day, take it three times a day; don't wait until the pain gets really bad.
- If you are taking tablets, always take them with water, not hot or fizzy drinks. Swallow the tablets whole and never crush or chew them, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- Make sure that you eat regularly - this means that there is less chance of you feeling sick. 
- If you get side effects and they are bothering you, speak to your chemist, nurse or doctor.
- **Always** keep your medication in a safe place.

Remember



As well as taking your medication, try to use the other methods discussed in this booklet

Useful contacts

Name		
Doctor		
Pain clinic		
Pharmacy		
Other		

Other useful contacts

NHS Direct

0845 4647

Patients' Association

0845 608 4455

Painline

0845 603 1593

Pain Association Scotland

0800 783 6059

Pain Concern

01620 822 572

