

Living Well with Chronic Pain

Understanding Pain

- Pain is the body's way of alerting us to avoid a potential threat.
- Pain is processed by the **nervous system** (nerves → spinal cord → brain)
- The experience of pain is dependent on contextual factors such as previous experiences, thoughts and emotions.
- Pain does **not always mean tissue damage**. There can be pain without an injury to the body.

Chronic Pain & Sensitization

- With ongoing pain, the nervous system can become **sensitized**.
- Pain can be triggered more easily such as with movement, postures, stress and anxiety.
- Things that normally don't hurt may feel painful. For example, exercise and movement can lead to pain even at light intensity.
- Imaging (X-ray, MRI) does **not always match pain**. Some people have important changes on imaging and don't have pain, while others have little changes on imaging and have pain.

Self-Management is Key

Self-management empowers you with the tools and skills to manage your own pain. This includes preventing flares from occurring, managing episodes of pain and improving function despite pain.

Learning to self-manage your pain

1. Change how you react to pain
 - a. Use the pain and flares as a learning experience. Identify triggers and best ways to manage it.
 - b. View the flare as an opponent. This will empower you to actively engage in activities to improve your pain and your function.

2. Distract your nervous system

- a. Turn negative thoughts and emotions into positives (glass half full).
- b. Practice mindfulness or meditation as research has shown that it helps in improving pain and function.
- c. Return to activity as tolerated and slowly increase your activity over time.
- d. Keep Active and continue with your usual activities.

In completing your daily tasks you need to think about **energy conservation** and use the **4 P's**:

- **Prioritize**
 - What is the most important thing you want to accomplish?
 - What are the costs and benefits of the activities that you want to do?
- **Plan**
 - Create a schedule of when you want to do your activities
 - Spread out your tasks so you do not overload yourself
 - Incorporate breaks into your daily routine
- **Position**
 - Modify activities to make sure you don't overload yourself
 - Incorporate breaks into your daily routine
 - Make posture checks
- **Pace**
 - Take your time to perform activities or exercises
 - Break your activities into smaller pieces, or chunks
 - Incorporate breaks into your daily routine and activities
 - Implement graded activity in your life

Graded Activity for Chronic Pain

Why is Physical Activity Important?

- Studies have shown that if you exercise, you are less likely to have a flare and you can maintain your function for longer.



Find an Activity You Enjoy!



Something you want to do
but are limited by pain

OR

Walking, Yoga, or Pilates



Set Your Baseline

Start at **70%** of your baseline tolerance.

Example: If you can walk 20 min before pain, Start at 15 min.

Learn to Pace

- ✓ Repeat daily
- ✓ Increase time weekly (10%-20%)
- ✓ Set Goals

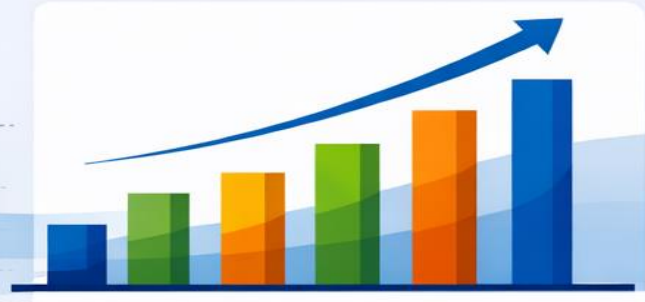
Ex: Week 1: Walk 15 min

Week 2: Walk 16.5 min

Week 4: Walk 20 min

Week 6: Walk 24 min

Week 9: Walk 32 min



Achieve & Celebrate

Make Concrete Plans

“When and where you will walk”

Reward Your Success!

Ex: Walk 30 min within 10 weeks

