

The Pain Toolkit

...is for people who live with persistent pain

A persistent or chronic pain problem can be difficult to understand and manage on an everyday basis. The Pain Toolkit gives you 12 tips and skills to support you to manage your pain.

Acknowledgements

This resource has been adapted by Diversity Health & Pain Management, Prince of Wales Hospital with permission from 'The Pain Toolkit' written by Peter Moore (www.paintoolkit.org).

Peter is someone who experiences chronic pain.

Translations funded by the Prince of Wales Hospital Foundation and the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District.

Revised | January 2013

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What is persistent pain?

Persistent (sometimes called chronic or long-term) pain is pain that continues for three months or more and may not respond to standard medical treatment. It can be disabling and frustrating for many people to manage. It can also affect relationships with family, friends and work colleagues. Sometimes people with persistent pain are told by healthcare professionals after assessment:

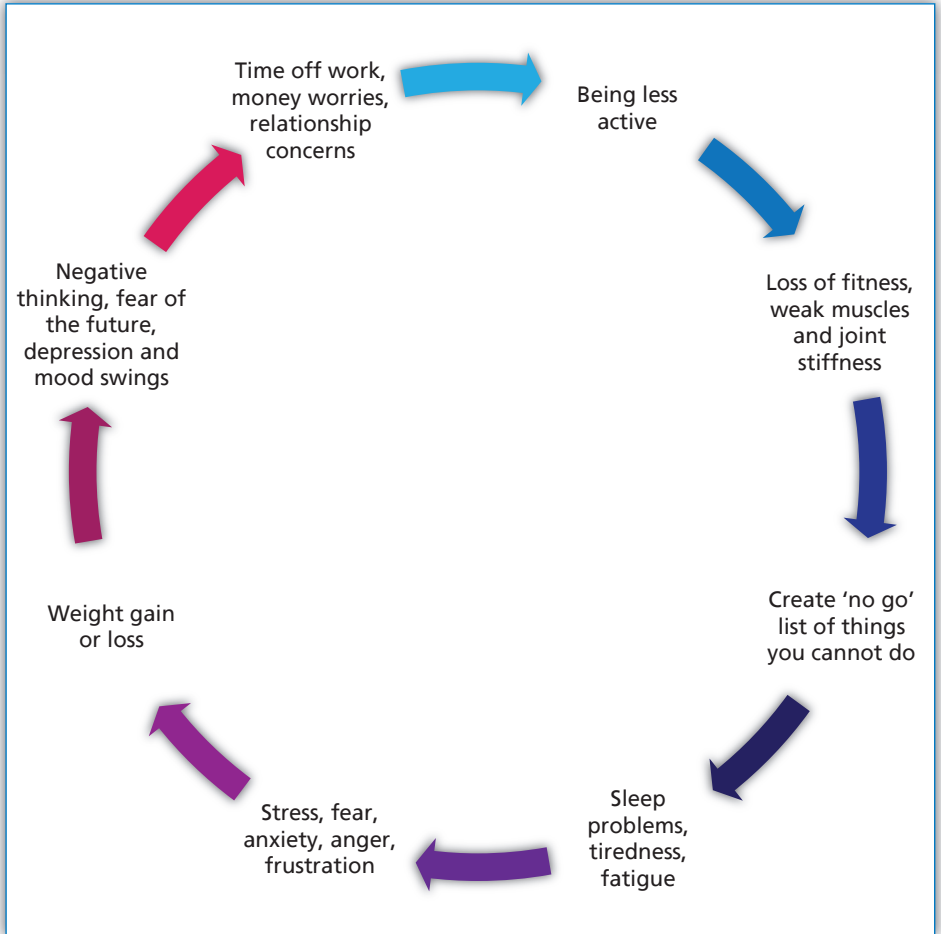
"I am afraid you have a chronic or long-term pain problem. You will have to learn to live with it".

Is persistent pain a problem in Australia?

The short answer is "yes", so you are not on your own. Research shows that one in five people in Australia suffers chronic pain. The occurrence of chronic pain is expected to increase as Australia's population ages (*Blyth FM et al. Chronic pain in Australia: a prevalence study. Pain 2001; 89: 127-134*).

The persistent pain cycle

The arrows can go anti clockwise as well. For example, time off work can lead to negative thinking and fear of the future, which can lead to stress and anxiety.



Do you feel trapped in a persistent pain cycle?

If so, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Do you do more on good days and less on bad days?
2. Are you an over achiever – doing more than you have to?
3. Are you a people pleaser? Do you have a problem saying “NO” to others when you are asked to do things?

Could you see yourself in the persistent pain cycle and did you recognise yourself in the three questions above? If so, then this Pain Toolkit is for you.

Have you become a ‘can’t do’ person?

A ‘can’t do’ person is someone who has tried to carry out or take part in everyday tasks such as going to work, doing the house work, gardening, playing a sport, going on holidays, going to the cinema, eating out or taking part in family activities but has stopped or given them up because of pain. When this happens it is usual for confidence levels to fall. Does this sound familiar? If you have reached this point you need to stop and take action.

By taking on board and practising these tools you could become a ‘can do’ person again but it may take time so please be patient with yourself.

Why do I need to manage my pain? After all I see my health care professional and aren’t they supposed to do that for me?

Many people with persistent pain see their health care professional for treatment, help and support. But have you actually estimated just how many hours during the course of a year you spend with your health care professional?

On average people with health conditions (including pain) may spend just a few hours a year in contact with a health care professional. For most of the time you are on your own. So the need to learn pain management skills and incorporate them in their everyday activities is very important.

Your next question may be ***“How can I become more involved and how do I get started?”*** Having skills and tools can be helpful. It is like a motor mechanic who has many tools in his/her toolbox to repair and maintain cars. People with pain also need a selection of tools to help them successfully self-manage their pain.

You may not need to use all the tools suggested in the toolkit, but like any good motor mechanic it is best to have a variety of tools ready for when and if they are needed. Self-managing persistent pain is not as hard as you may think - so let's get started and look at the first tool in your pain self-management toolkit.



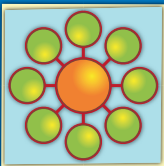
Tool 1

**Accept that you have persistent pain...
and then begin to move on**

Acceptance is the first and the most important tool in your self-management toolkit.

Acceptance is not about giving up but recognising that you need to take more control with regards to how you can better self-manage your pain.

Acceptance is also a bit like opening a door – a door that will open to self-managing opportunities. The key that you need to open this door is not as large as you think. All you have to do is to be willing to use it and try and do things differently.



Tool 2

Get involved – build a support team

Successfully managing your pain requires getting help and support from others. Ask your health care professional, friends, family and work colleagues about working more together and becoming a team. Find out if there are existing support groups in your community you could join. These groups may be useful in identifying self-help management skills.



Tool 3

Pacing

Pacing daily activities is one of the key tools to self-managing your pain. You need to pace your work and also other everyday activities. Did you recognise yourself in the pain cycle? Do you tend to over do things, or rest too much and become inactive and lose fitness?

Pacing means:

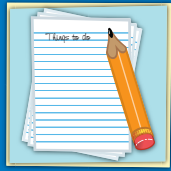
- taking a break before you need it throughout the day,
- planning your activities,
- dividing large tasks down to small parts and doing one bit at a time, not doing everything at once.

Examples of pacing your daily activities

- Instead of doing a large load of ironing at once, spread it over a period of days eg have two or three piles of ironing: an urgent pile, a not so urgent pile, and a *'I can do that at the end of the week'* pile.
- Instead of doing one large weekly shopping make several smaller trips to the shops during the week.
- Divide your shopping into more bags, so that you are not lifting and carrying heavy bags. Remember to ask staff from the shop to carry and then put your shopping into the car. Get someone such as a family member or a neighbour to help you to lift and carry your shopping into your home.
- Consider internet shopping, and then you just have to pack the items away once they have been delivered to your home.

If you stop and think about what you intend to do before you do it, then there is less of a chance that you will have a set-back and in turn increase your pain.

Remember pacing is *'taking a break before you need it'* and spreading out your activities.



Tool 4

Learn to prioritise and plan out your day

Prioritising and planning your day is an essential tool. Make a list of things you would like to do but remember to be flexible. It is a great way to set yourself a starting point.

For example:

- Monday morning: vacuum the living room and have a couple of breaks so that you pace yourself.
- Monday afternoon: prepare food for your evening meal. Sit down if you need to do this.
- Tuesday morning: go swimming, meet a friend for a coffee/tea, and practise some relaxation when you get home.
- Tuesday afternoon: write an activity plan for the next day.



Tool 5

Setting goals and action plans

It is useful to have something to aim for. Perhaps, you could set yourself a simple, hourly, daily or weekly action plan. Always ask for help from your health care professional if you are not sure. You can also learn more about setting goals and action planning when you attend a self-management program.

Patience

Tool 6

Be patient with yourself

Take things steadily. It may take you a few weeks or months to see changes or improvements. When you start to feel good, you may want to catch up with activities that you may have let go of. Don't be tempted to over do it otherwise your chances of yet another set-back could increase. A good saying is *"take things one day at a time"*. And also...ask for help and support from others when you need it.



Tool 7

Learn relaxation skills

Relaxation skills are very important for tense muscles in the body and for unwinding the mind. Relaxation could involve:

- Reading a book
- Listening to some music
- Gardening
- Meeting friends for coffee/tea
- Going to the cinema or a restaurant
- Belly breathing (your health care professional could show you how to do this)
- Meditating
- Dancing
- Walking

Body care

Looking after your whole body is very important, so please think about:

- Eating healthy food
- Sleeping only at night and avoiding short naps during the day
- Daily washing and grooming



Tool 8

Exercise and stretching

Many people with pain fear exercise in case it causes more problems. However this is not true. Regular stretching and exercising actually decreases pain and discomfort. It prepares the body for other activities. It can strengthen weak muscles and you will also feel better for it. Remember to start slowly and build up gently.

If you are in pain, remember that unfit and under used muscles feel more pain than toned ones. Talk with your physiotherapist or fitness coach about an individually tailored stretching and exercise program that you can work on steadily and safely. This will help you build your confidence, muscle and joint strength. Consider swimming (or just walking up and down in the pool) which is a low impact exercise and is good if you have joint problems. Other types of exercise you might want to consider are tai chi, yoga or pilates.

Reasons why stretching and exercising is good for you:

- Helps to improve and maintain good overall health
- Enhances your cardiovascular system – heart, lungs and blood vessels
- Increases muscle strength
- Improves flexibility
- Increases endurance and stamina
- Increases natural pain killers (called endorphins) in the body's nervous system which help control pain
- Helps with weight control
- Helps to improve quality of sleep
- Helps balance and co-ordination
- Reduces fatigue and increases energy
- Reduces muscular tension, stress and depression
- Helps combat depression and anxiety
- Helps maintain a positive outlook
- Helps to prevent constipation
- Can be sociable

Please make sure that your teacher is qualified and experienced in teaching people with persistent pain.

You should be encouraged to exercise at a pace that feels right for you.



Drinking water

Water is essential for a healthy life so drinking plenty of water is important for everyone.

It's even more important if you are taking part in physical exercise, so make sure you keep properly hydrated before, during and after exercising.



Tool 9

Keep a diary and monitor your progress

Keeping a diary of your progress will help you to see how far you have come and note the successes you have achieved. This will help you to build on success. It is also handy to note down what didn't work for you so you can learn from those experiences. We sometimes learn more from our perceived failures than our successes.

Try to write down one piece of evidence each day to show yourself how you are positively self-managing your pain. Doing this has been shown to increase people's confidence.



Tool 10

Have a set-back plan

Is it realistic to think you will never have a set-back?

The simple answer is “no”.

Developing a set-back plan is good pain self-management. Make a note of what triggered your set-back and what helped. This could be useful information if, and when, you experience another.

Remember if you are an over achiever, it is easy to forget to pace yourself and in turn you may experience a set-back. So the first thing is **not to panic**, but many people do.

Set-backs are usually caused by doing too much – overdoing it, pressure from others, or just forgetting you have a pain problem. Don't get annoyed with yourself, it is common to occasionally have set-backs.

If you are not sure how to prepare a set-back plan ask your GP or health care professional for help.

Examples of a set-back plan

- ***Prioritise your responsibilities***

Pace yourself. Break up tasks into smaller portions. Rest in between. Reduce your activities until the set-back settles. Be kind to yourself. Say “no” to any unnecessary demands until you are feeling healthier. And don't be too proud or scared to ask for help.

- ***Take your medication if you think you need to***

Follow or ask the advice of your GP or Pharmacist about medication and when you need to take it. If you have to take regular medication think of ways to remind yourself to take it. Many people just simply forget. Use post it notes, use an alarm or get someone to remind you. Please remember that taking medication if you have musculoskeletal pain (back, leg, arm, neck etc) may mask the pain and encourage you to do more.

- ***For musculoskeletal pain (back, leg, arm, neck etc)***

Apply heat and/or ice in a way that makes you most comfortable. To relieve initial pain, you could apply ice packs wrapped in damp towels for 5 minutes every hour for the first one or two days. Always make sure you have a cloth of some type between your skin and the ice to prevent burning the skin and causing an ice burn. It is not recommended that you lie on an ice pack.

People with rheumatic problems may prefer to use heat rather than ice.

- ***Take it easy***

Briefly cutback on normal activities, lie down for a short while and relax but not for too long. Bed rest weakens muscle strength rapidly, you lose about 1% of total muscle strength a day if you become inactive. Remember keeping active and mobile can actually speed your recovery.

- ***Try to start moving gently***

Remember to pace yourself. Begin gentle stretching and movement as soon as possible to regain normal suppleness.

- **Relaxation**

Using relaxation is another good way of managing a set-back. Also accept the situation and that you are experiencing a set-back, and just as it came, it will go.



Tool 11

Team work

Team work between you and your healthcare provider is vital. Managing your pain is not a 'one way street' and it is unrealistic for your healthcare professional to totally solve it for you.

You have an important part to play as well. Make a list of questions to ask your healthcare providers. Together both you and your health care professional can set an action plan. This action plan could help you both track your progress.

Useful questions to ask

- _____

- _____

- _____



Tool 12

Keep going.... putting into daily practice the tools from 1-11

You may be asking yourself, do I have to put these tools into practice every day? The simple answer is “**yes**”.

Just as a person with diabetes has to take their treatment/ medication and maintain their diet daily, your treatment is planning and prioritising, pacing, setting weekly or long-term goals and action plans, relaxation, exercise, generally keeping active and being in charge of your pain. Keeping going is difficult for many people but it's not as hard as you think once you have set yourself a routine. Just like brushing your teeth, self-managing your pain will become a habit. Get others involved and make pain self-management fun.

What three things have I learnt about managing my pain?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Useful resources

- You Tube video, Understanding Pain: What to do about it in less than five minutes?
www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b8oB757DKc
The video transcript is available from http://www.apsoc.org.au/pdfs/HIPS_Pain_Video_Transcript_201109.pdf
- Australian Pain Society, Tel. 02 9016 4343,
www.apsoc.org.au/links.php
- Chronic Pain Australia. Tel. 1800 218 921,
www.painaustralia.org.au
- Pain Australia Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Chronic-Pain-Australia/113469682042024
- Australian Pain Management Association.
Tel. 1300 340 357,
www.painmanagement.org.au/home
- Your local library will have useful information (access to the internet, books, DVD's, CD's) about other local health and community initiatives.

Self-management programs

In some areas self-management programs are offered by trained volunteers who often have a chronic health condition (including pain) themselves but have learnt to become good self managers. For information go to www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/self_management_of_chronic_diseases



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