

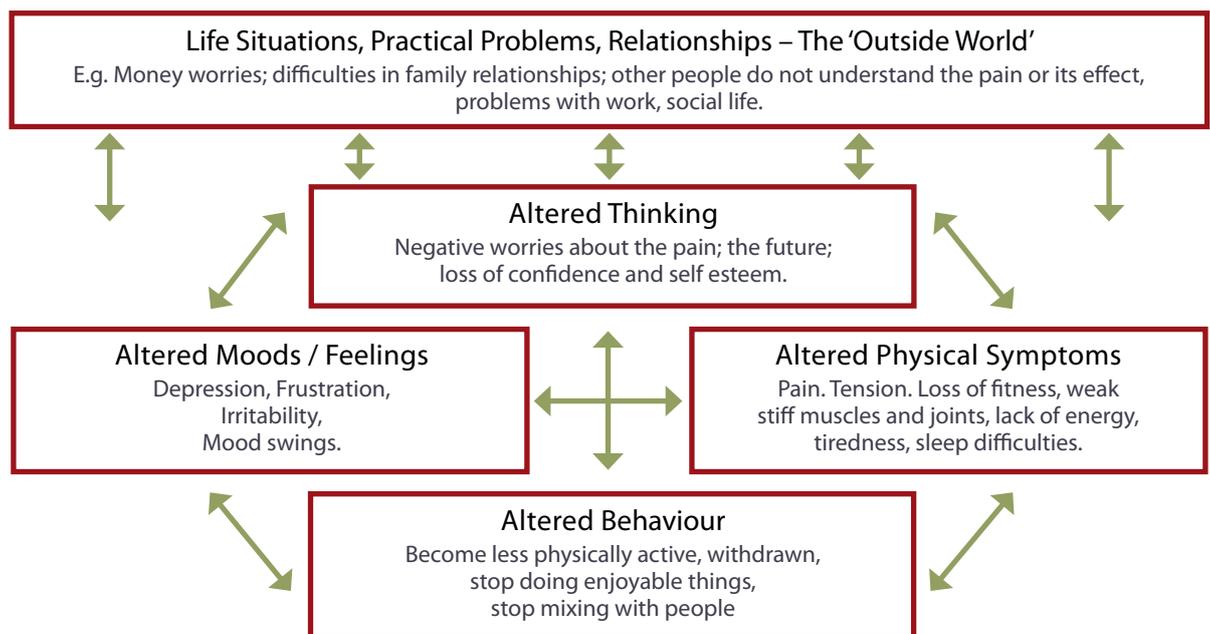
## Coping with Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a condition where pain continues for 3 months or more. It is a common problem which affects 1 in 7 people in the UK. It can be a difficult condition to understand, treat and cope with every day as it often does not respond to usual medical treatments. It can affect the person in their every day life, their moods, activities with their family, friends and work colleagues. It can be disabling and frustrating for many people.

Do you feel trapped in a cycle of pain? 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? – You may have a problem saying NO to others who ask you to do things.

Do you recognise yourself in these three questions and in the cycle below?



Sometimes people with symptoms of pain are told by a healthcare professional:

*“I’m afraid you have chronic or long-term pain and you will have to learn to live with it”*

This is possible with some skills, tools and support. The ideas for these skills and tools have developed from work with people affected by pain over many years.

Living with pain is possible but can be difficult at times. People with pain need a selection of skills and tools to help them manage their pain. There are often pain management services locally available, or a specialist Pain Team. They may be able to help improve pain relief with different treatments of drugs, devices or injections, talking therapies, or suggest putting a number of treatments together in a pain management programme. Pain Management Programmes (PMP) help give people the confidence to be in control of their pain and its effects rather than the other way round. Your GP can help you to access these services.



- > Guided Self Help – An Introduction
- > How Normal Stress, Anxiety & Depression Can Become a Problem

- > Recognising Helpful & Unhelpful Behaviour
- > Recognising & Changing Unhelpful Thinking (various)
- > Local and National Self Help Organisations

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### Contd.

Information about other support and reading material is available on other leaflets that your guide can give you – *there is a list to the left of this leaflet.*

- > Ask your guide/ healthcare professional about working together and develop a PMP together. Find out if there are other NHS or non NHS support groups in your community who could provide you with more self-help management. The more information you have, the more empowered you will feel.
- > Accept you have long-term pain and then move on. Acceptance is difficult but is an essential step in managing your pain. Many people go looking elsewhere for a cure, but you may be wasting your time and money, although some NHS trusts now offer free alternative and complementary therapies which may help.
- > Set priorities. Prioritise your needs. Make a list of things you would like to do. It is often helpful to set yourself a starting point, and then gradually work up your list of priorities. This can build your confidence and help you gain a sense of control over what is happening.
- > Pacing. Pace your work and everyday activities. You may have recognised yourself from the pain cycle. You may overdo things, or rest too much and become inactive. Pacing daily activities is one of the key tools to managing pain. Never use pain to guide your activities. Put in regular small breaks or changes in position.
- > Setting Goals / Action Plans. You sometimes want to run before you can walk. Set yourself simple realistic goals - you need goal posts when playing football, or a finishing line when racing. Perhaps you could set yourself a simple hourly, daily or weekly action plan – there is a separate leaflet on '*Changing Unhelpful Behaviours – Becoming More Active*' that has a sample activity diary to help you plan your activities.
- > Be Patient with yourself. Take things steady. It may have taken you a number of months or years to become someone with long-term pain. It may take a few weeks or months to see an improvement. A good saying is 'take things one day at a time'.
- > Learn relaxation skills. Relaxation skills are very important in managing pain. Tense muscles and body tension can increase your pain. Ask your guide for leaflets on Relaxation and Relaxed Breathing.
- > Exercise. Most people with pain fear exercise in case it may cause more problems. This is an unhelpful belief as unused stiff muscles will feel more pain than toned ones. Discuss with your physiotherapist or guide an individual simple stretching and exercise programme that you can do safely. This will help you build your muscle and joint strength over weeks and months. You may find your pain can decrease and you will start to feel more flexible and in control.
- > Keep a diary as you start to change, to set priorities, pace set goals, learn to relax, and exercise safely. Keeping a diary will help you to see how far you have come. Keep a note of the positive evidence about activities to show you are managing your pain. Ask your guide for a sample Daily Diary.
- > Have a set back or 'flare up' plan. Is it realistic to think you will never have a pain flare up? The simple answer is NO! Having or developing a setback plan is an important part of pain management, to help build self confidence and hopefully reduce the severity and regularity of flare ups.
- > Medication may be part of your PMP but evidence shows that YOU can make a big difference to your pain by using the above steps to effectively take charge of your pain. If you are prescribed medication make sure that you take the right dose at the right times so that its effects can be accurately measured.
- > Self-Help and Support. There are a number of self-help and support groups, websites and books that can help you with your pain management. Ask your guide for details.

