

Community Chronic Pain Program

Self-Management Handbook



Image by upklyak on Freepik

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Understanding Pain

Pain facts

- Pain is personal and always real.
- Pain is complex. It is a sensory and emotional experience. It is not just a tissue issue.
- Pain involves sending messages between your brain and your body.
- Pain's role is to protect you by "alarming" you that something might be wrong.
- Pain depends on the balance of danger and safety.

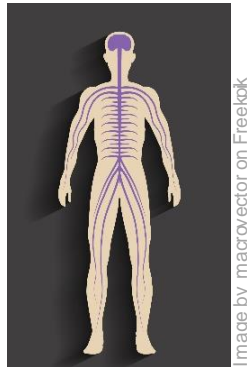


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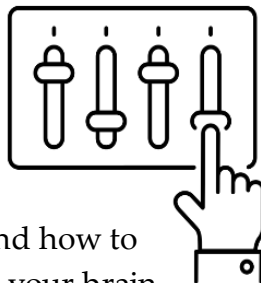
Pain processing

Special nerves called nociceptors (say no-sih-sep-ters) in your body detect potential danger and send a warning message to your brain.

Your brain processes this warning message with other things like mood, context, other body systems, past experiences.

It can turn the message from your nerves up, or turn it down, much like changing the volume on a device.

Your brain then decides if and how to respond. The response from your brain is the pain you feel.



Music controller by Vectors Point from Noun Project

The alarm is not always accurate

- You can experience very little pain despite a significant injury, like a soldier in a life-or-death situation.
- You can experience a lot of pain when there is minimal or no damage, like a paper cut or migraine.
- You can have pain in body parts that do not exist anymore, like phantom limb pain from an amputation.

These examples show that pain does not always relate to what is happening in your tissues. Pain is not always accurate. When your brain decides you need protection, you experience pain. Your brain makes the decision based on many messages it receives.

Hurt does not always equal harm. Continuing to have pain does not mean you are re-injuring yourself repeatedly.

Example of pain processing

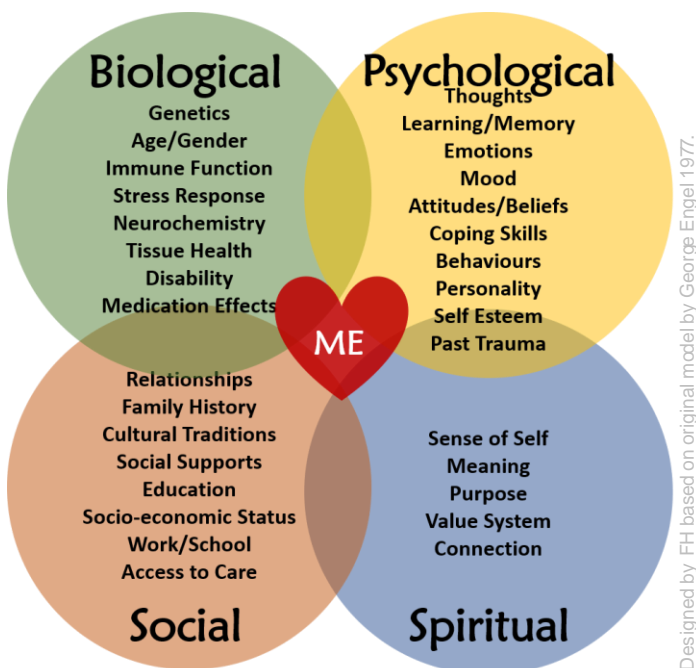
The pain experienced from a bee sting can be different for someone who is afraid of bees compared to someone who is not. Their brain will process the sting differently based on fear and previous experience.

Pain influences

Have you ever noticed how your pain changes when you:

- have a bad night's sleep?
- become sick?
- feel unhappy?
- feel stressed out?

Pain is complex. Mood, context, sleep, stress, activity, beliefs, past experiences, genetics, hormone system, diet, and thoughts all influence pain. This is called the **Biopsychosocial Spiritual Model**.



Based on the Biopsychosocial Spiritual Model by George Engel, 1977.

Neuroplasticity

The good news is that your nervous system can change. In fact, it is always changing. This is called **neuroplasticity** (say *nur-oh-plas-tis-ity*). Because of neuroplasticity, you have the potential to change your pain experience.

Your nerves learn what they practice and can learn pain. Learning pain increases the sensitivity of the alarm. If you introduce the right information to the nervous system, you can also train it to become **less** sensitive, resulting in less pain.

Chronic pain

Chronic pain (also called persistent pain) is pain that has lasted longer than the expected healing time.

It is more a result of changes to the nervous system versus ongoing tissue damage.

Chronic pain might begin with an injury or illness but might also have no clear cause. It happens when the alarm system becomes too sensitive.

Signs your alarm is too sensitive

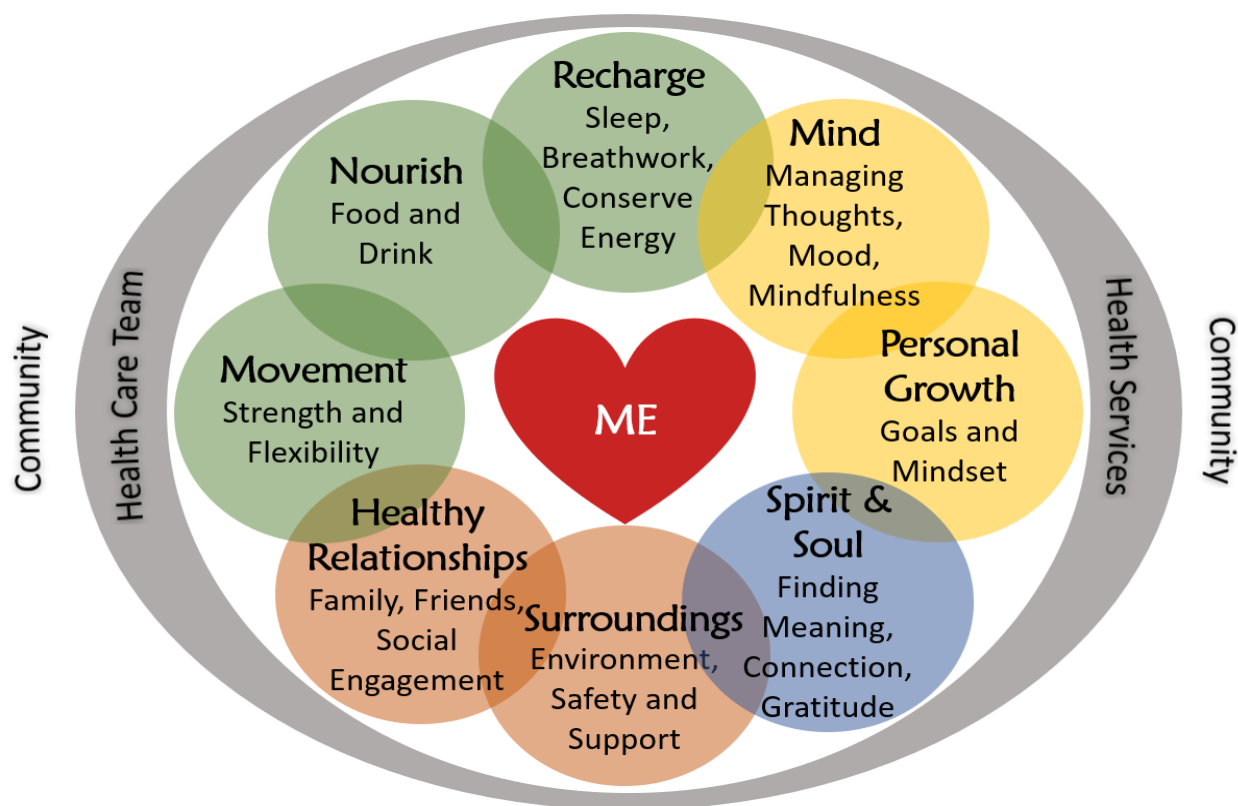
- Pain feels more severe than expected, as if it is spreading or getting worse.
- Pain to things that should not be painful such as light touch.
- Pain that starts for no reason.
- Difficulty using muscles such as when muscles give out, strength decreases, or coordination is poor.
- Inflammation, swelling, or redness without a cause.
- Pain that worsens with stress, poor sleep, over-activity, and mood changes.

How to retrain your brain and reduce sensitivity

Learn about pain. Studies tell us that people who understand why they hurt often hurt less. The following can help you understand your pain.

- Start to identify possible triggers for your pain such as poor sleep, diet, mood, thoughts, and beliefs.
- Learn ways to calm your nervous system and regain some control.
- Begin a gentle movement program. Motion is lotion!
- Learn mindfulness, meditation, and breathing techniques.
- Learn how to challenge the alarm so that over time you can do more with less pain.

Self-Care Model for Managing Persistent Pain



Designed by Fraser Health based on model from VA Whole Health for Life 2019

What stood out to me in this section?








Questions I still have on this topic

Pain Modulators

Pain modulators are things that make you feel more pain or less pain. You might want to explore your pain modulators. G. Lorimer Moseley and David S. Butler developed the concept of **Danger in Me (DIMs)** and **Safety in Me (SIMs)**. You want to have more SIMs and fewer DIMs. Below are some examples of DIMs and SIMs.

DIMs

SIMs

Hearing your MRI results		Things you hear, see, smell, taste touch	Listening to calm music
Rest all day	Things you do		Gentle movement
"I have so much pain"		Things you say	I have sensations
"This pain will never end"	Things you think and believe		My brain can change
Surgeon's office		Places you go	My best friend's house
Nosy neighbour	People in your life		Friends who understand me
Depressed		Things happening in your body	Happy

Based on *The Explain Pain Handbook: Protectometer* by G. Lorimer Moseley and David S. Butler.

Icons by [flaticon](#) [eye](#) [man](#) [speak](#) [thought](#) [car](#) [people](#) [face](#)

Resources

Videos

[Neuroplasticity](#)

Learn how the brain can change. This 2 minute animated video explaining how brain pathways change due to neuroplasticity.



[The Pain Revolution](#)

Learn the science of pain in this 21 minute talk from Professor Lorimer Moseley. He explains research by giving examples of experiencing pain. Learn how science is showing there are alternatives to drugs for pain.

[Mysterious Science of Pain](#)

Explore the factors that influence pain by watching this 5 minute animated video by Joshua Pate, PhD.



Websites



[Pain Management Network](#)

Develop skills and knowledge in self-management of pain. See the short video called An Introduction to Pain.

[Tame the Beast](#)

Learn to re-train your pain system back to providing protection when you need it, but not when you don't. Listen to real stories of people who have experienced pain and recovery.



[Pain BC: Live Plan Be](#)

Read articles and watch videos on various pain topics. Listen to real stories of people who learned to understand their pain, and what worked for them. Learn to make small changes that help.

[Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute – Pain U Online](#)

Complete the learning modules called Pain U Online. Watch the learning module on Pain Education.



Apps

The Pain Truth. A free persistent pain education app. View videos and enter activity log.

Books

Explain Pain by David Butler and Lorimer Moseley

Understand Pain, Live Well Again by Neil Pearson

The Brain's Way of Healing by Norman Doidge

[Pain Science Workbook](#) by Greg Lehman. Click on title for free download.

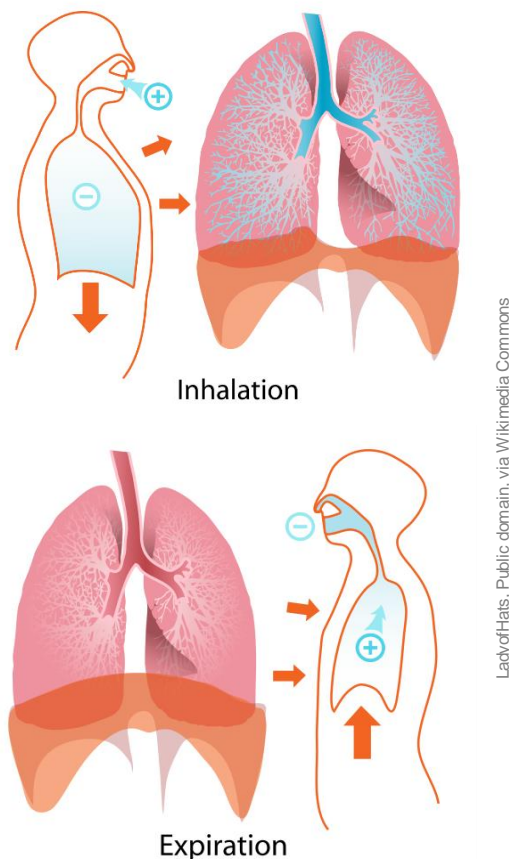
Belly Breathing

What is belly breathing?

Belly breathing means breathing from your diaphragm, which is a dome-shaped muscle near the bottom of your rib cage.

Belly breathing is also called **diaphragmatic breathing** (say *dye-ah-frag-mat-ik*).

When you breathe in (inhale), your diaphragm contracts and pulls down to make space in your rib cage for your lungs to expand. Your belly expands as you breathe in. The reverse happens when you breathe out (exhale). Your diaphragm relaxes back up, and your belly and ribs move in.



Chest breathing compared to belly breathing

If your diaphragm is weak, or you breathe using your chest muscles more than your belly, you might be chest breathing. When you chest breathe, you use your neck muscles to help your rib cage expand. Imagine using your neck muscles for every breath you take during the day! This can lead to neck pain.

Studies also show that a weak diaphragm can affect trunk strength and might cause low back pain.

Breathing and the nervous system

Your Autonomic Nervous System (A.N.S.) controls your breathing. This part of your nervous system controls your involuntary body functions and organs.

The A.N.S. divides into two main branches. The branches are the sympathetic (fight or flight) and parasympathetic (rest and digest). Even though most of these functions are involuntary, you can control some A.N.S. functions by doing deep breathing exercises.

Benefits of belly breathing

How you breathe can affect your nervous system and your whole body. In other words, belly breathing exercises are good for your health.

Benefits of belly breathing include helping:

- Slow your heart rate
- Lower your blood pressure
- Decrease your levels of a stress hormone called cortisol
- Increase relaxation
- Increase your energy
- Improve your immunity
- Reduce your pain

Steps to belly breathing

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your spine.
2. Relax your shoulders.
3. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
4. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your belly moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should only move a little.
5. Breathe out slowly through your nose or mouth.
6. Repeat.

When you first learn belly breathing it might be easier for you to practice it lying down. As you get better at it, you can try belly breathing while sitting in a chair or other position of your choice.



Source unknown

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Video



[Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique](#)

Learn to belly breathe. This animated 3 minute video guides you through the steps to belly breathing.

Websites

[Relaxation, Yogic Breathing and The Vagus Nerve: Its All About the Exhalation](#) – Yoga U

Read how deep breathing helps reduce stress. Learn how exhaling from a deep breath can trigger the vagus nerve to slow your heart rate, and help you feel relaxed.



[Yogic Deep Breathing: How the Diaphragm Works](#) - Yoga U

Read how your diaphragm works. Includes a video guiding your through several minutes of deep breathing. The video shows how the diaphragm moves as you breathe.

Apps

iBreathe

Practice basic deep breathing exercises. Includes an option for push reminders.

Breathe+

Practice basic deep breathing exercises. Set up a schedule to do breathing exercises, with visual or vibration reminders.

Guide to Goals and Action Plans

Set a goal

If you set a goal, you will be more successful at making changes to your health. Your goal should describe something that you want to accomplish in 3 to 6 months.

Your goal needs to be S.M.A.R.T.!

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-based

Examples of goals

I would like to increase my physical fitness by being able to walk 5 blocks by April 1st

I would like to reduce my waist by 1 inch by April 1st

Make an action plan

Your action plan describes specific behaviours that will help you reach your goal. Your action plan should answer the following 4 questions:

- What will I do?
- How much?
- How often?
- When?

Example of action plan

I will walk for 20 minutes after breakfast on Monday, Wednesday and Friday starting next Monday.

Rate your confidence

Your action plan should be challenging for you, but you need to feel confident that you can complete it. Review your action plan and rate your confidence on a 10-point scale.

0 means you have no confidence that you can complete this plan.

10 means you are very confident that you can complete this plan.

If you rate your confidence as less than 7, studies show you will be less likely to complete your goal. Consider changing your action plan so that your confidence rating goes up.

Keep track of your progress

Review and update your action plan each week. Post it where you will see it often, as a reminder.

Have a follow-up plan

Overcome Your Barriers. If you are not successful with your action plan, explore the barriers that prevent you from completing it. Think of ways to get over these barriers. Write these solutions on your follow-up plan.

Example of follow-up plan

Barrier: *I did not walk this week because of the rain.*

Solution: *I could walk in the mall, or get a raincoat and use an umbrella.*

Date _____

My goal is: _____

What am I going to do to help move me towards this goal? _____

How much and how often? _____

When? _____

Where? _____

Barriers: _____

Solutions: _____

Rate Confidence:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not sure at all						Very Sure				

How will I follow up?

Follow-up #1: Date: _____ ☐ Successful ☐ Unsuccessful

Barriers: _____

Solutions: _____

Follow-up #2: Date: _____ ☐ Successful ☐ Unsuccessful

Barriers: _____

Solutions: _____

Follow up #3: Date: _____ ☐ Successful ☐ Unsuccessful

Barriers: _____

Solutions: _____

Self-management handbook

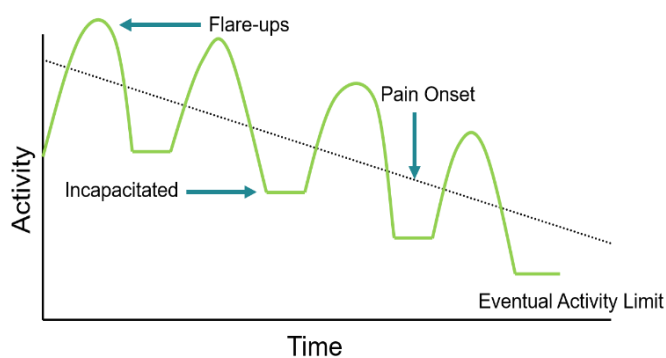
Energy Conservation

What is energy conservation?

Energy conservation is doing activities in the most efficient way to limit fatigue, pain, and joint stress.

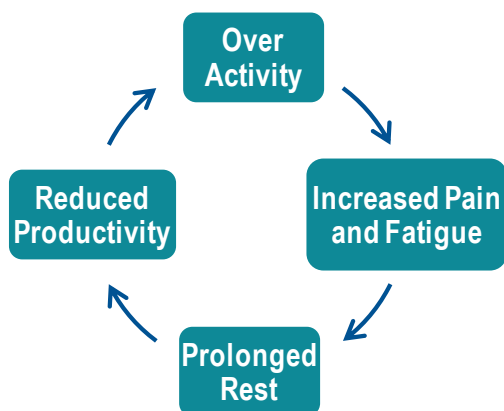
Boom and bust activity pattern

This is when you push through the pain to get your activities done.



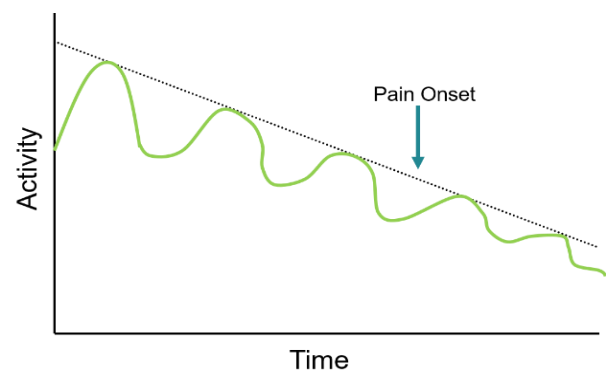
You will often flare up and then must rest for a longer time to recover. During your long rest times, you get very few activities done. You then need to push through pain again to get your activities done.

This leads to the **Pain and Fatigue Cycle**.



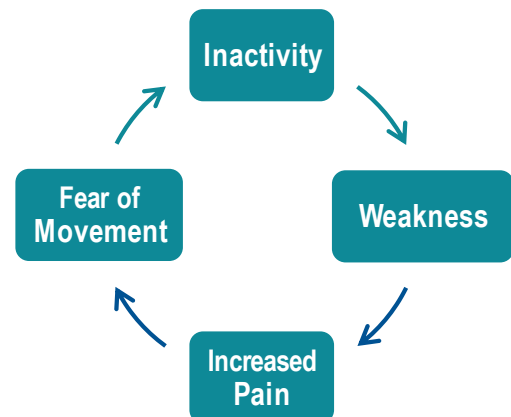
Pain avoidance activity pattern

This is when you protect yourself by stopping activity as soon as there is pain, or you avoid all activity.



Over time, inactivity leads to weakness and lower tolerance to activity. When you do activity, it is often harder and more painful because your body is not used to it. This can cause you to fear movement.

This leads to the **Cycle of Inactivity**.



Energy conservation can help you break these cycles.



The 5 principles of energy conservation

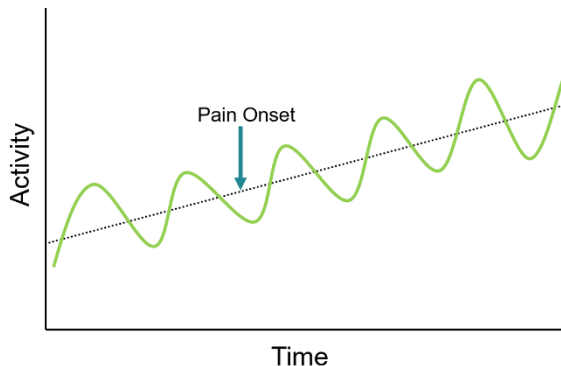
- Pacing** Paying attention to how long you are doing activities. Having a good balance between rest and activity.
- Planning** Looking ahead to organize your tasks, and your days and weeks, to have a good balance. Planning helps with efficiency and with reaching your goals.
- Prioritizing** Making sure you spend your energy on the activities that are most meaningful and are time sensitive.
- Positivity** Keeping a good attitude towards your daily tasks and your health. Including pleasant activities in your day.
- Posture** Reducing the amount of effort you need for a task by putting your body in the best position to do the task, and also adjusting the things around you.

Can you think of activities that you pace?

Do you plan your activities?

Pacing

Pacing is about finding a good balance between activity and rest. When you pace effectively, you get more done. Your symptoms are less likely to bother you and you might have fewer and shorter flare-ups.



Keys to pacing

- Take short rests frequently in your day instead of just a few long rests.
- Rest **before** symptoms increase. Rest to prevent fatigue and pain.
- Use **time**, not pain or the completion of a task, to decide when to rest.

Pacing is time-based



OpenClipart-Vectors from Pixabay

Pacing skill – finding baseline

The first step to pacing is finding your starting point. Your starting point is called your baseline.

Step 1: Measure your tolerance. Choose an activity that is difficult for you or that you want to more of. Measure the length of time you can do this activity before it is too uncomfortable. Repeat on 3 separate days.

Step 2: Calculate your baseline. Add the total length of time for all 3 days. Divide this number by 3. This is your average tolerance. Next, reduce the time it by 20%. To reduce by 20% you multiply the time by 0.8. This is your baseline.

Step 3: Test it. Do the activity and stop when you reach your baseline.

You might notice that you have fewer flare-ups. This means the baseline is right for you.

If your pain got worse and is still more than pre-activity level **after 2 hours**, this activity is too much. You need to lower your baseline.

Step 4: Challenge yourself. After 1 week of success at your baseline, you can slowly increase your time by 10%.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Tolerance	20%	Baseline
15 min	10 min	7 min	11 min	~2 min	9 min
Tolerance: (Day 1 + Day 2 + Day 3) divided by 3 = $(15\text{min} + 10\text{min} + 7\text{min})$ divided by 3 = 11 minutes of sitting					
Baseline: Tolerance – 20% = $(11\text{ minutes} \times 0.8)$ = 9 minutes of sitting then change position					
My Baseline for <u>sitting</u> is <u>9</u> minutes.					

My activity _____

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Tolerance	20%	Baseline
-------	-------	-------	-----------	-----	----------

My baseline for _____ is _____ minutes.

My activity _____

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Tolerance	20%	Baseline
-------	-------	-------	-----------	-----	----------

My baseline for _____ is _____ minutes.

Pacing skill – activity and rest schedule

If the activity that you want to do takes longer than your baseline, create an activity and rest schedule.

Step 1: Know your baseline. See the Finding Baseline section above for details.

Step 2: Choose a rest time. Choose a length of time for rest that you feel is enough.

Step 3: Alternate activity and rest time. Do this until you complete your task, or as long as you can.

Step 4: Monitor. If you have a good balance of activity and rest, you are much less likely to cause a flare-up. If you find that you are still doing too much activity, adjust your activity and rest schedule by doing one or both of these:

- Take a shorter time for activity
- Take a longer time for rest

Step 5: Challenge yourself. After 1 week of success with your activity and rest schedule, you can increase your activity time by 10%.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:
<i>Laundry</i>						
Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:
<i>5 mins</i>						
Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:
<i>5 mins</i>						

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:
Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:	Activity Baseline:
Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:	Rest Time:

Planning

Planning means thinking about your daily or weekly schedule. Planning helps you:

- follow your action plans.
- reach your goals.
- manage stress.
- do your activities with fewer steps.

Make sure you schedule enough time for each activity and include enough breaks. Plan to do your most challenging activities at the time of day when you are the strongest.

Balance your activities.

- Space out heavy and light tasks.
- Alternate between sitting and standing activities.

Plan tasks in steps. For example, cut vegetables, rest, and then cook later.

Think about when you might need help or a rest day. Add that to your plan.

Prioritization

Decide which task is most important or is your priority. Spend your energy on the most important task first to make sure it gets done.

You might want to wait until a later day to do some tasks. For example, wait to do a difficult task until someone is available to help you.

You might want to skip any unnecessary tasks.

Positivity

How we think, and what we believe, affects how we feel.

Think about what you expect from your daily activities. Is what you expect allowing you to enjoy your activities? You might want to change what you expect.

Try to include pleasant activities in your schedule. Give them high priority.

- Look for ways to do a task in a way that makes it more enjoyable. While doing the task you might try listening to music or talking to someone you care about.
- Think of the positive parts of the activity.
- Use positive self-talk to keep motivated.
- Compare yourself to your progress last week instead of before your injury.
- Write down things you have done and celebrate your success.

Examples of pleasant activities

Draw or paint	Try a new food
Write in journal	Go for coffee
Watch a movie	Star gaze
Watch the sunset	Go to library
Visit or call a friend	Visit a park
Read a book	Be in nature
Listen to music	Write a letter or email
Knit	Play cards
Meditate	Have a picnic
Go for walk	Play an instrument
Play a board game	Volunteer
Play with pet	Cook a meal or bake

Planning and prioritizing skill – weekly planner

Step 1: List activities

On a blank piece of paper, write down all the activities you want to do in the next 7 days. Include appointments, household chores, errands, phone calls, emails, social activities, exercise, and self-care. Be sure to include some pleasant activities.

Step 2: Organize activities

Think about each activity in your list and decide if it is a ‘Must Do’, ‘Want to Do’, ‘Can Delegate’, or ‘Pleasant Activity’. Write the activity in the correct column in the worksheet below.

For the ‘Must Do’, ‘Want to Do’, and ‘Can Delegate’ columns, rank the activities by priority from 1 to 10. Start by writing 1 next to the activity you feel is the most important in that column. Write 2 next to the activity you feel is the second most important for that column. Continue to write a number for each activity based on its priority.

Worksheet						
Must do		Want to do		Can delegate		Pleasant
Activity	Priority 1-10	Activity	Priority 1-10	Activity	Priority 1-10	Activity

Step 3: Schedule 'Must Do' activities

Start with the highest priority activity (number 1 in priority) from the 'Must Do' column. Write it into the Weekly Planner that is below. Then go to second priority activity and add it. Continue adding activities in order of priority. Consider re-scheduling lower priority activities to another week if your schedule is too full.

Step 4: Schedule 'Pleasant' activities

Now add your 'Pleasant' activities to your Weekly Planner. Make sure you include enough time for breaks.

Step 5: Schedule 'Want to Do' activities

Lastly, add your 'Want to Do' activities to the Weekly Planner. Start with the greatest priority activity. Leave any activity that does not fit in your Weekly Planner this week on your list for next week. You might want to schedule some time in your Weekly Planner to tell people about the activities from your 'Can Delegate' list.

My Weekly Planner for _____

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
M			
T			
W			
Th			
F			
S			
Su			

Posture

Posture is the way you hold our body when standing, sitting, walking, working, and exercising. Posture looks at the position of the body parts to one another and to the environment.

Good posture is posture that puts the least strain and stress on your body. As you pay more attention to your body's position, good posture becomes more natural. Your muscles that protect and support your spine become stronger.

Why posture matters

Your spine is involved in all postures and activities. Chronic pain can cause you to develop poor posture that can make symptoms worse.

Good posture can make it easier to do your daily activities. Using good posture can send positive information to your brain and prevent injuries.

Ways to have good posture

- Try to have your spine in a neutral position. This puts less stress on your body.
- Try to avoid movements that repeat often.
- Move closer to objects that are far away instead of reaching far.
- Change your posture and activities often.
- Separate heavy items that you need to lift into several lighter pieces if possible.
- Use larger muscle groups whenever possible.

Standing

- Stand up tall with your feet wide apart for a stable base.
- Pull your chin in. Relax your shoulders down and back.
- Lift your chest forward and up.
- Keep your knees relaxed and slightly bent.
- Place one foot on a footstool or other object to ease tension in your back.
- Wear flat shoes and stand on a cushioned mat if you stand for a long time.
- Raise or lower work surfaces.

Working at a counter

Shoulders and Arms:

- Shoulders relaxed
- Work at elbow height
- Keep elbows close to body

Head and Neck:

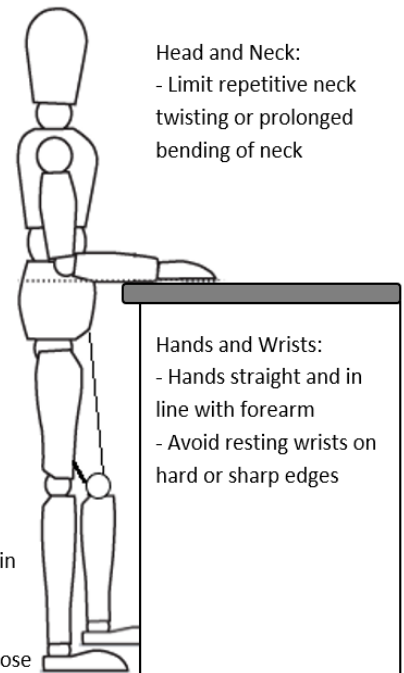
- Limit repetitive neck twisting or prolonged bending of neck

Back:

- Straight posture
- Sit/stand stool for change in posture
- Avoid repetitive twisting or prolonged bending

Feet and Legs:

- Footrest or rest foot in cabinet for position change
- Toe space to stand close to counter



Hands and Wrists:

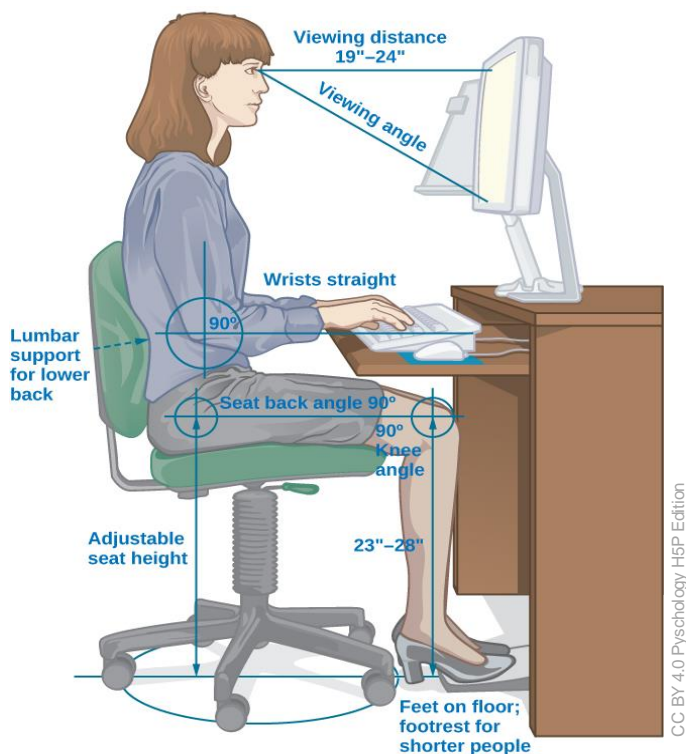
- Hands straight and in line with forearm
- Avoid resting wrists on hard or sharp edges

Sitting

- Keep a natural spinal curve. Use a lumbar support or a rolled up towel to support the curve in your lower back.
- Sit evenly on both buttocks.
- Adjust your chair height to keep your knees level with your hips.
- Have three fingers width space from the back of your knee to the end of the chair.
- Support your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Relax your breathing.

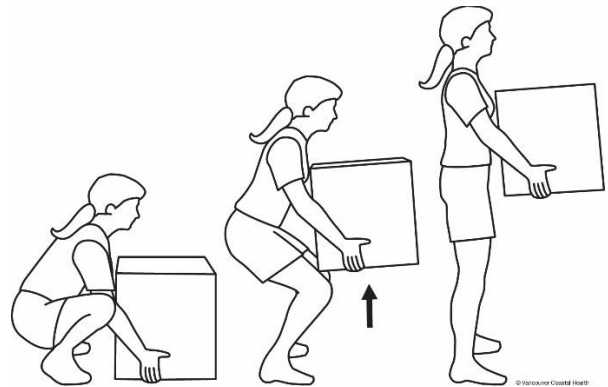
If you have sat for a long time, take a break. Stand up. Move around. Stretch.

Working on a Computer



Lifting

- Stand square to the item you are lifting.
- Keep a stable and wide base.
- Keep a natural spinal curve.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Relax your breathing.
- Keep your core muscles engaged.
- Lift with your legs.
- Keep your heels on the ground for balance.
- Keep the item close to your body.



If the item that you are lifting is heavy and must travel a distance, you might want to lift in stages. For example, first move the object from the floor onto a chair. Rest. Then move the object from the chair onto the counter.

Instead of lifting, you might decide to slide the object. It is better to **push** an object than pull it. Your body stays more even, and you can use your body weight to assist you.

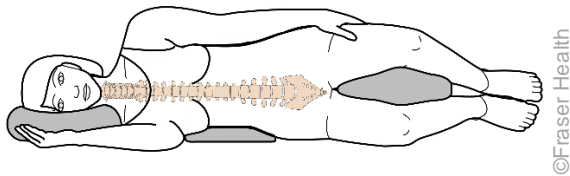
Sleeping

Lying on your side

Use one or two pillows, or a contour pillow, to keep your neck in line with your spine. Your pillow should be thicker when side sleeping due to the distance between the side of your head and shoulder.

Use a pillow between your knees to help keep your spine aligned. A u-shaped or body pillow works well for this too.

You might want to add a pillow along your back, under your waist, or under the top arm to help align your spine.



Avoid lying on your stomach

Try to sleep on your side or back. Sleeping on your stomach causes your lower back to arch and forces your neck to the side in an unhealthy position.

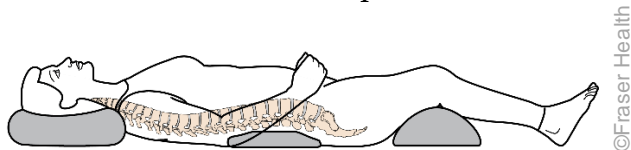
If you do choose to sleep on your stomach, use only a thin pillow for your head and place a pillow under your hips. You might also want to place a pillow under your shins for knee and ankle comfort.

Lying on your back

Place your pillow under your head and neck. The bottom of your pillow should line up with the top of your shoulders.

Use a pillow under your knees to decrease tension on the lower back.

You might want to put a pillow under your shoulders, arms or lower spine.



Daily tasks

Everything you do during the day needs energy. Daily tasks often bring on pain and fatigue, especially when you are in the Pain and Fatigue Cycle or the Cycle of Inactivity.

Here are ways that the 5 P's of energy conservation can help you save energy and reduce flare-ups as you do your daily tasks. The 5 P's will also help you avoid getting into the cycles.

What daily tasks are difficult for you? How could you modify?

Personal care

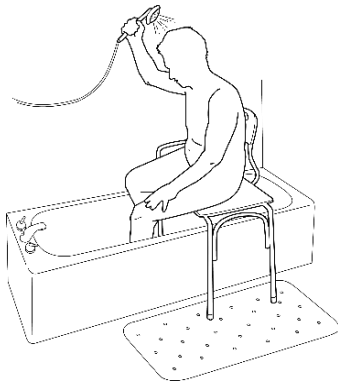
Taking a bath or shower

If bathing is tiring for you, try taking a bath or shower every other day. Take a sponge bath instead.

Install grab bars for extra support when getting in and out of the shower or tub.

Use a shower chair or tub transfer bench to sit on. It is easier to get in and out of a tub if you are on a chair instead of sitting in the bottom of the tub.

Use a hand-held showerhead if you sit on a chair. This will help you control the water flow.



Use a sponge with a long handle to wash your back and feet.

Instead of drying off with a towel, put your bathrobe on right away. Leave it on until you are dry.

Getting dressed

Choose clothes that:

- are easy to wear and loose fitting
- do up in the front or pull on
- have zippers, elastic waistbands, large buttons or Velcro.

Sit down to get dressed. Use tools to help you dress, such as:

- a long-handled reacher



- long-handled shoe horn



- a sock aid to help you pull on your socks without bending forward
- shoe laces that don't need tying

Organizing kitchen

Setting up your kitchen

Consider placing a high stool in the kitchen so you can alternate between sitting and standing. Also, keep a step stool in the kitchen for reaching up into high cupboards.

Think about where you put items.

- Keep items you use often:
 - near each other
 - within easy reach
 - around the level of your waist
- Keep clean dishes you use every day in a drying rack or stacked on the counter.
- Keep heavy items on the counter.
- Put items back where they belong after use.

Think about the types of items you use.

- Use lightweight utensils and pots, such as anodized aluminium instead of cast-iron.
- Use non-stick pots and pans so they are easier to clean.
- Use sharp knives to decrease effort when cutting.
- Consider electric tools like can openers, carvers, mixers, and choppers.

Grocery shopping

Planning your meals in advance

Choose recipes that: require less stirring and less attention. Consider one-pot meals such as casseroles, soups and stews.

Keep meals in the freezer and reheat them on days you have less energy.

Planning your trip to the grocery store

Make a list of items you need. Take it with you to the store.

You might want to go to a smaller store to limit how much you need to walk in the store.

Shopping at the grocery store

Use a shopping cart. Place heavy items near the handle.

Ask someone to help you reach high or low items. Ask to have your bags packed lightly so they are easier to carry.

Find a place to sit for a break.

Unpacking groceries

Place perishable items in a cooler so that you can rest when you get home and unpack later.

Use a small, wheeled cart to bring your groceries into your home. Bring a few bags at a time. Place groceries on the counter to sort.



@Vancouver Coastal Health

Order groceries online

When entering your order, include a message asking to have bags packed lightly so they are easier for you to carry from the door into your house.

Choose a delivery time that is a time when you usually have energy.

Preparing food

Consider making extra food so you have enough for another meal or two.

Set out the items you need before you start. Don't forget to use your electronic tools.

Put a cloth underneath heavier items so you can slide them along the counter instead of lifting.

Sit as much as you can.

Washing dishes

If you have a dishwasher, use it as much as possible. Sit on a chair to load and unload your dishwasher.

Sit on a high stool to wash your dishes. Place one foot on a stool or edge of the counter to relieve pressure in your back.

Place a plastic container upside-down in your sink to raise the height of the sink bottom.

Let pots and pans soak in hot soapy water.

Let dishes air dry in a drying rack on the counter.

Put a few dishes away at a time.

Doing housework

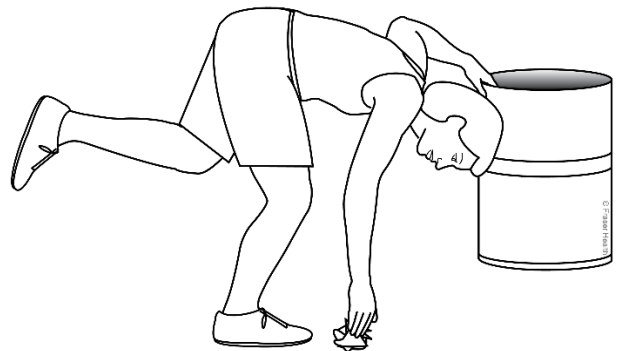
Cleaning

Do only one heavy job a day. Clean one room at a time. Try to keep your home tidy every day so there is less to clean. The following can make cleaning easier:

- Have a basket or small bag at the bottom of the stairs to collect items. Take them up on your next trip.
- Use a bucket with a handle to carry cleaning supplies.
- Use lightweight equipment, such as a lightweight vacuum or mop.

To do less bending, try the following:

- Sit to clean when possible. For example, sit on a chair in the bathtub or shower stall to clean.
- You might want to try these tools:
 - long handled cleaning tools, like a dustpan and brush
 - long-handled reacher to pick up items off the floor
- Use Golfer's Lift to pick things up or to reach.



Doing laundry

Carry laundry in a rolling cart or mesh bag that you can drag. If washer and dryer are downstairs, throw the clothes down the stairs in bag instead of carrying them.

If possible, place the washer and dryer on risers to decrease the amount of bending needed.

- Do laundry in smaller loads.
- Sit on a chair or stool to put clothes in and out of the washer and dryer.
- Place smaller items in a mesh bag, making it easier to remove from the washer and dryer.
- Remove clothes from dryer and fold them right away instead of ironing. If you do iron, use a lightweight iron and sit to iron.
- Sort clothes on a table or counter.

Making your bed

Use lightweight blankets.

Make one side of the bed. Then move around the bed to finish each side.

Put one knee up on the bed if you are stretching the bedding across the bed. Try to keep your back straight as you lean.

You might want to try an ergonomic bed sheet-tucking tool.

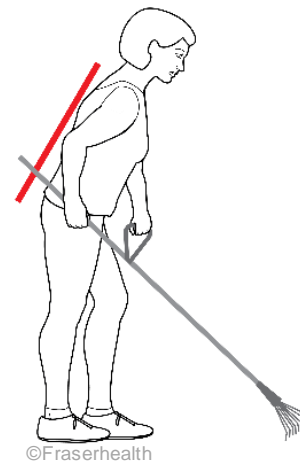
Doing yard work

Doing outdoor chores

Remember to take rest breaks when you are doing outdoor chores. Sit as much as possible while you work.

Use ergonomic and lightweight tools. Keep similar tools stored together for convenience. Try these tools:

- a folding or rolling stool
- a garden kneeler
- a wheeled cart to transport items



Mowing the lawn

Use a lightweight mower. Do the mowing over several days.

Driving

Getting into your car and positioning

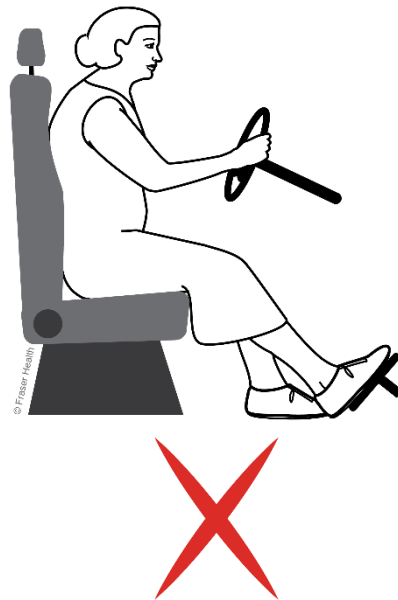
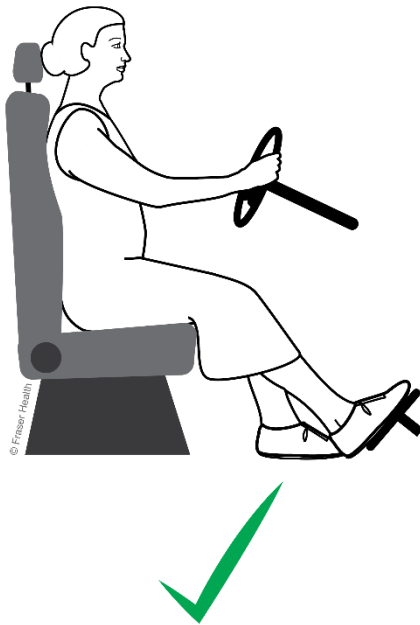
Sit down on the seat first to get into your car. Keep your knees together. Then swing your legs in.

When you need to change your position, you might want to pull your car to the side of the road.

Driving your car

Consider which of the following might be helpful for you when driving.

- Portable handle to help you get in and out of the car
- Clip on armrest to support arms for neck and shoulder pain
- Lumbar support cushion to support your back. Or, adjust the seat for support.
- Neck pillow to support your neck
- Blind spot mirrors and a wide-angle rear-view mirror to help you see more



What stood out to me in this section?

Pacing

Planning and Prioritization

Positivity

Posture

Questions I still have on this topic

Energy conservation skill – exploring activities

This worksheet will help you use the 5 P's of Energy Conservation to problem solve an activity.

See the getting groceries example below. Then try with one of your own activities on the empty worksheet on the next page. Choose an activity that you are still finding difficult. Write your activity in the first blank. Write why it is important to you in the first row. To plan and prioritize activities, it is helpful to know why this activity is important to you. Continue to fill in each of the rows.

My Activity getting groceries

Why is this activity important to you?	<i>We need food Must pack lunches</i>	<i>I like to eat Family depends on me for this task</i>	
What steps does this activity involve?	<i>Driving to store and back Standing in line Reaching for items Heavy lifting</i>	<i>Walking Loading groceries Unpacking groceries Long time</i>	
Which steps are challenging for you?	<i>Standing in line Reaching for items Heavy lifting</i>	<i>Walking Loading groceries Unpacking groceries Long time</i>	
What can I do differently?	<u>Pacing</u> <i>I can break up a big grocery shop into smaller shops I can take breaks by sitting at Pharmacy I can take a rest when I get home, then go back to unload the car</i>	<u>Planning and Prioritization</u> <i>I can choose a time of day that I am my best at Go when its less busy to avoid line ups I can meal plan so I know what I need I can make a grocery list This will save me time and stress Plan to go with helper</i>	<u>Posture</u> <i>I can use proper lifting technique Bring reacher for things down low Always use buggy <u>Positivity or Mindset</u> Ask for help loading Get kids to unload Perhaps I order online when I am more flared</i>

My Activity _____

Why is this activity important to you?	
What steps does this activity involve?	
Which steps are challenging for you?	
What can I do differently? What am I willing to change? Think of the 5 Ps: Pacing Planning Prioritization Posture Positivity	

Resources

Videos



[Proper Lifting Technique](#)

Learn how to lift objects off the ground in this 3-minute video.
A physiotherapist demonstrates the correct position of the body.
Focus is to prevent back injuries.

[Computer Ergonomics](#)

Learn the best posture and positioning for sitting at a computer. A two-minute animated video with no audio.



Websites



[Daily Living with Chronic Pain](#) – Fraser Health

Read tips for living with chronic pain. Explains the 5 P's.

[Tips for Everyday Living](#) – Live Plan Be

Read articles, watch videos and listen to audio. Tips to help you conserve energy and function well in your home environment.



[Assistive Devices and Tools to Ease Chronic Pain](#) – Live Plan Be

Learn how to use assistive tools and techniques. Includes two videos by Occupational Therapists. Videos demonstrate bathing, food preparation, housekeeping, gardening and more.

[Pacing](#) – Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute

Check out the learning module on pacing. Learn to make a pacing plan.



Apps

Calendar Apps

Use your cell phone calendar or computer calendar to help with planning and pacing or try a calendar app. Connect your family's calendar into your calendar.

Books

[How to Make Your Computer Workstation Fit You](#) by WorkSafe BC.

Go to link to download book for free or buy a paper copy.

Movement

What are the benefits of moving?

Studies tell us that people who are active and move more are better able to manage their pain.

Safe movement can help:

- Improve your mood.
- Regulate your sleep.
- Give you more energy.
- Release “endorphins” which are your body’s natural pain reliever.
- Retrain a sensitive nervous system
- Regulate your immune system

It can also help:

- Improve your strength, flexibility, and posture
- Prevent injury and falls
- Prevent bone loss
- Improve your circulation
- Keep your heart and lungs healthy

What is the best type of movement?

The best type of movement to start with is an activity that you already do, you enjoy, or is familiar to you. Some examples are walking, a home exercise program, or a gentle class at your local recreation centre or pool.

To increase success you should feel safe with the activity you choose. You will enjoy the activity more if you feel safe.

If you are not sure of what you can do, ask an exercise specialist such as a physiotherapist.

How can I move more in my day?

Sit less every day

Try doing some of your daily tasks, like talking on the phone, while standing instead of sitting.

Studies tell us that too much sitting is connected to:

- Higher blood pressure.
- Higher blood sugar.
- Higher levels of inflammation in your blood.
- Increased risk for chronic disease.

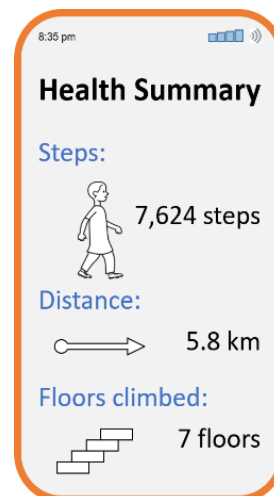
Sitting just 4 to 5 minutes less every hour can have health benefits.

Do more light activities

Try standing up every 30 minutes.

When you have a choice to increase your activity, like parking further away at the grocery store, try it.

You might want to start tracking your steps with a cell phone app, sport watch, or other step tracker.



How do I get more active?

Start LOW

Find a level of activity, or number of exercises, that feels comfortable. Repeat that level for a few days before increasing. Consider the F.I.T.T. principle explained in the next section.

Go SLOW

When you are ready, try to increase your activity by 10% every week or so. For example, increase from walking 10 minutes to walking 11 minutes.

Plan and pace yourself

Plan activity for the time or day that is best for you. Balance your days so that you are not exercising on the same days as you need to do a lot of physical work. Take rest breaks.

Set goals

Set realistic goals. Know where you started and where you are going. Goals give you a feeling of accomplishment.

Calm your nervous system

Try breathing exercises before or after your activity. Breathing exercises help put your nervous system in a calm state.

Have a plan for flare-ups

When you have a flare-up, reduce your activities to 50% of your normal. Try using heat or ice, pacing, breathing, and positive self-talk to get through the flare-up.

While you are being active:

- Keep your breath calm
- Keep your body tension low
- Pay mindful attention so you know if your body needs you to change the activity



Image by storyset on Freepik

What is the F.I.T.T. principle?

You might have found it difficult to increase your activity in the past. The F.I.T.T. Principle helps you plan your activity so you can get started safely.

There are 4 parts to F.I.T.T.

Frequency

Frequency means the number of times per week or day that you do your activity.

Exercising every day is better than exercising once per week.

Intensity

Intensity means how much effort you put into your activity.

Some exercises require a higher intensity. For example, lifting 10 pounds is more intense than 5 pounds.

You can change the intensity of an exercise like walking by:

- Walking on a flat surface, or up and down hills
- Walking on a track, treadmill or trail
- Walking with larger or smaller steps
- Walking faster or slower

It is okay for your pain to increase during movement if it returns to your pre-exercise pain level within 1 to 2 hours.

Time

Time means how long you do an activity.

Measure time in seconds, minutes, or repetitions.

The exercise should challenge your pain but not cause it to flare-up.

Type

Type means the type of exercise the activity provides.

There are many ways to exercise. There is no best way.

Types of exercise include:

- **Aerobic**, like walking, swimming, or biking
- **Strength**, like weights or resistance bands
- **Flexibility**, like yoga and stretching

Some activities, like yoga, Tai Chi and exercise classes in a swimming pool, combine aerobic, strength, and flexibility.

Example of using F.I.T.T.

You walk for 20 minutes and have a pain flare-up that lasts until the next day. To prevent a pain flare-up the next time, you could:

- Change the time and try to walk 5 minutes.

or

- Change the intensity and walk where there is only flat ground.

Change only one part of F.I.T.T. at a time.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Videos

[Pain BC Gentle Movement @ Home](#)

Try free guided movement and relaxation videos. Taught by experienced movement therapists.



[YMCA At Home](#)

Try online classes of gentle low impact exercise. Taught by fitness trainers from the YMCA.

Websites

[Canadian 24 Hour Movement Guidelines](#)

Get guidance on the ideal amount of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep for your body.



[PAR-Q+](#)

Check if exercise is safe for you before you get moving. Take the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire for Everyone (PAR-Q+).

[HealthLink BC Overcoming Barriers](#)

Read a webpage discussing common barriers to physical activity. Learn how to overcome your barriers.



[Pain Care for Life](#)

Explore self-care resources designed by a Canadian leader in pain management. First 5 steps are free.

[YMCA Community Programs](#)

Find free health and fitness programs in your community. Organized by the YMCA.



Apps

Down Dog

Try various yoga programs with a selection of skill levels.

FitBit: Health and Fitness.

Track your activity, sleep and nutrition.

Books

Yoga for Pain Relief: Simple Practices to Calm Your Mind and Heal Your Chronic Pain

by Kelly McGonigal

Self-management handbook

Gentle stretches

Upper body stretching

Hold these stretches for 5 to 30 seconds. Repeat 1 to 2 times.

Only stretch as far as feels comfortable.

Neck flexion and range of motion



- Sit with good posture



- Slowly lower your chin towards your chest as far is comfortable

These movements should be gentle. If you feel pain, bend your neck less.

Upper trapezius stretch

- Sit tall. Place your hand behind your back or holding the chair, to stabilize your shoulder.
- Bring your ear to your opposite shoulder.
- Bring your chin towards your chest.
- Repeat with other side.



Levator scapulae stretch

- Sit tall. Place your hand behind your back or holding the chair, to stabilize your shoulder.
- Bring your nose to your armpit.
- You can use your opposite hand to guide your head further into the stretch.
- Repeat with other side.



Anterior scalene stretch



- Sit with good posture.
- Hold front of neck with your hand as shown.



- Bend your head to the side away from your hand.
- Rotate head towards your hand.
- Repeat with other side.

Shoulder posterior stretch



- Sit or stand with good posture. Put one arm forward.
- With your other hand, grab your arm just above the elbow.



- Reach across your chest.
- Use your other arm to pull a little bit further.
- Repeat with other side.

Rhomboid stretch



- Clasp your hands in front of you at shoulder height.



- Push your hands away from your body.
- At the same time, pull your shoulders towards your hands.
- Feel a stretch in your upper back.

Pectoralis stretch – wall



- Place forearm against the wall, with arm at shoulder height.
- Stand tall with good posture.



- Twist away from the wall.
- Feel a stretch across your shoulder and chest.
- Repeat with other side.

Lower body stretching

Hold for 5 to 30 seconds. Repeat 1 to 2 times.
 Only stretch as far as is comfortable.

Knee to chest stretch – sitting



- Sit with good posture in a chair.
- Lift one leg off the ground and hold it with both hands.



- Bring your knee to your chest.
- Repeat with other leg.

Knee to chest stretch – lying



- Lie on back with knees bent.
- Bend both knees and keep feet flat on floor.



- Pull one knee up towards your chest, as high as you can.
- Keep opposite knee bent.
- Use arms to gently pull knee further.
- Repeat with other leg

Hamstring stretch - sitting



- Sit on the edge of a chair.
- Have eyes and head forward, hands resting on thigh, toes towards the ceiling.
- Put one leg straight.



- Lean forward from your hips.
- Feel a stretch in the back of your leg.
- Repeat with other leg.

Hamstring stretch – lying



- Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor.
- Straighten one leg.
- Tighten your core muscles to keep your lower back stable.



- Bring one leg up with your knee straight.
- Grab the back of your thigh. For a deeper stretch, gently pull your leg towards your chest.
- Slowly lower your leg.
- Repeat with other leg.

Gluteus stretch – sitting



- Sit with good posture.
- Put one foot on top of the opposite knee.
- Push knee down.



- Lean forward.



- Push knee down as you lean.
- Repeat with other leg.

Gluteus stretch – lying by wall

- Lie on back with your knees and hips bent. Put feet flat on wall.
- Cross your ankle over your opposite knee
- Push your knee towards the wall.
- Repeat with other leg.



Piriformis stretch - sitting



- Sit with good posture.
- Cross one knee over the other.



- Keep good posture.
- Bring knee forwards to opposite shoulder.
- To increase stretch, lean slightly forward.
- Repeat with other leg.

Piriformis stretch - lying



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Cross one leg over the other.



- Grab your knee with your hands.



- Pull your knee toward your opposite shoulder.
- Repeat with other leg.

Wide leg stretch



- Sit tall on edge of a chair with feet flat on the floor.
- Step your feet wider than your hips. Inhale to lengthen your spine.
- Inhale and lengthen your spine.



- Exhale slowly.
- Lower your chest to your thighs. Put your elbows on your knees.



- Relax your head and neck.
- Breathe deeply into your belly.

Child's pose



- Put your hands and knees on the floor. Have your buttocks above your knees. Have your shoulders above your hands.



- Bring your buttocks over your heels and stretch your arms.
- Let your head and trunk relax to the floor.

Images from SimpleSet.net and used with permission.

Gentle movements

Belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing)



- Sit tall on the edge of a chair with your feet flat on floor.
- Place your hands on your belly, just below ribs.
- Relax neck and shoulders down. Allow your belly to be soft.



- Breathe air in to your belly (inhale). Feel your belly press into your hands and your hands lift.



- Breathe out and soften your belly (exhale).
- Try to lengthen time of each inhale and exhale
- Try to limit movement of your chest and shoulders. Feel the movement in your belly and low ribs.

Posture correction



Sit with correct posture.

- Sit tall, like a string is pulling you upwards from your head. Do not arch your lower back.
- Lift the front of your chest up slightly.
- Tuck your chin down slightly like your are nodding “yes” and hold.
- Gently draw your shoulder blades down and back.



Do not slump your posture.



Do not over-correct your posture.

This can happen if you:

- arch your lower back too much.
- tuck your chin in too far.
- bring your shoulder blades too far together.

Neck rotation – active range of motion



- Sit with good posture.



- Look over your left shoulder as far as is comfortable.



- Look over your right shoulder as far as is comfortable.

Neck flexion and range of motion



- Sit with good posture.



- Slowly lower your chin towards your chest as far is comfortable. Let your head hang heavy.
- This movement should be gentle. If you feel pain, do not bend your neck quite so far.

Chin Tuck



- Sit with good posture.



- Tuck your chin down slightly, like you are nodding “yes”.
- Hold.

Shoulder shrugs



- Stand with good posture.
- Have your arms at your sides, slightly in front of your body.



- Raise shoulders up to your ears.
- Relax shoulders down.
- Roll your shoulders up, back, and around.
- Repeat in opposite direction.

Trunk flexion and extension



- Sit on edge of chair. Put your feet flat on floor. Put your hands on thighs.
- Inhale as you lean your trunk forward.
- Lift your chest.



- Exhale, round your shoulders and arch your back into chair. Round your shoulders.

Mountain pose



- Sit tall on edge of chair. Put your feet flat on the floor.
- Gently tuck chin down as you lengthen the back of your neck.
- Place arms beside waist as you pull your shoulders down and back.

- Breathe deeply in to belly.
- Inhale as you extend your spine.
- Exhale as you gently pull shoulders down and back.

Trunk rotation



- Sit tall on the edge of chair. Put your feet flat on floor.
- Place hands on waist or above head.

- Inhale and sit tall.
- Exhale and turn your trunk to one side. Keep feet flat on floor. Turn as far as is comfortable.
- Repeat in opposite direction.

Chair marching



- Sit with good posture in a chair.
- Put your feet flat on the floor. Have knees and hips at a right angle (90°).



- Keeping your posture good, lift one knee as high off the chair as you can, then relax and let it down.
- Repeat with your other leg.

Hamstring stretch



- Sit on the edge of a chair.
- Put one leg straight and keep it straight.
- Have eyes and head forward, hands resting on thigh of straight leg, toes towards the ceiling.



- Lean forward from your hips.
- Feel a stretch in the back of your leg.
- Repeat with other leg.

Toe extension and dorsiflexion - active range of motion



- Sit on chair with good posture.
- Put one foot in front of you and your heel on the floor.
- Bend your ankle to bring your toes towards your nose.
- At the same time, extend all of your toes as much as you can.
- Repeat with other leg.

Ankle circles



- Sit in a chair with good posture.
- Put the edge of your heel on the floor.
- Draw clockwise circles with you big toe.
- Repeat circles in the opposite direction.
- Repeat with other leg.

Trunk side-flexion stretch



- Sit on chair. Put your feet flat on the floor.
- Bend to one side, reaching one hand towards the floor and the other above your head.
- Try to keep your bum flat on the chair.
- Breathe
- Repeat with other side.

Belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing)



- Sit tall on the edge of a chair with your feet flat on floor.
- Place your hands on your belly, just below ribs.
- Relax neck and shoulders down. Allow your belly to be soft.



- Breathe air in to your belly. Feel your belly press into your hands and your hands lift.



- Breathe out and soften your belly.
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- Try to limit movement of your chest and shoulders. Feel the movement in your belly and low ribs.

Posture correction



Sit with correct posture.

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- Tuck your chin down slightly like your are nodding “yes” and hold.
- Gently draw your shoulder blades down and back.



Do not slump your posture.



Do not over-correct your posture.

This can happen if you:

- arch your lower back too much.
- tuck your chin in too far.
- bring your shoulder blades too far together.

Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness of our senses, thoughts and emotions.

“It is a regular, disciplined practice of paying attention to the present without trying to fix or change anything.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

How can mindfulness help?

Studies tell us that mindfulness can help you:

- Reduce your pain
- Manage your pain better
- Improve your concentration and attention
- Reduce your anxiety and depression
- Manage stress better
- Make your immune system stronger
- Reduce your chances of heart disease

What are attitudes of mindfulness?

Non-Judging. Pay attention to your experience in an accepting and non-judging way, without thinking the experience is good, bad, right or wrong.

Patience. Understand and accept that sometimes things must happen in their own time. Try not to rush through a moment to get to a better one.

Beginner’s mind. Be open to new possibilities. Look at an experience as if it is the first time.

Trust. Develop trust in yourself, your feelings, and your intuition. You are your own best guide.

Non-striving. Be yourself. See things as they are right now. Do not try to change or be in a better place.

Acceptance. Accept things as they are in the present. Do not spend energy resisting or denying what is true.

Letting go. Work on letting go of some of the thoughts, emotions, and sensations you are holding. Letting go is also called non-attachment and is key to mindfulness.

How do I practice mindfulness?

You can practice mindfulness through guided meditations, a body scan, and mindful movement like Yoga or Tai Chi. You might want to try the mindfulness activities explained in the next section.

You can include mindfulness in daily activities by taking a pause to reflect on the moment. The more you practice the better you get at it!

You do not need special equipment. All you need is your time and a space.

Mindfulness Activities

You might want to find a few minutes in your day to try one of the following mindfulness activities.



Sitting meditation

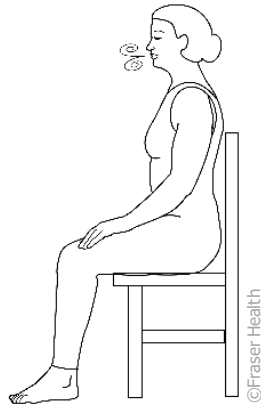
The first time you try meditation, you might want to set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes. As meditation becomes more natural, you can increase the amount of time you do it.

Go to a quiet space. Sit in a comfortable position. This could be in a chair, on a sofa, cross-legged or on a meditation cushion.

When you are ready, bring your attention to your breathing. Notice the air move in and out of your lungs. Try to keep your attention on your breathing.

It is natural for your mind to wander and pull your attention away from the present moment. Your mind might start to plan your grocery list, get bored, or start to feel uncomfortable. This is okay and it is normal.

- Try to watch your thoughts and feelings as if they are clouds, just floating through your awareness.
- Let them exist without attaching to them or judging them.
- Then if you can, try to bring your attention back to your breathing.



Grounding with the 5 senses

Use this exercise to ground yourself and bring yourself into the present moment. The goal is to give your attention to each of your 5 senses.

What are 5 things you see? Maybe you can see an object, light reflecting off a wall, or anything in your surroundings.

What are 4 things you feel? Maybe you can feel your clothing, the surface you are sitting on, or the ground under your feet.

What are 3 things you hear? Maybe you can hear the birds chirping, a car driving by, or a clock ticking.

What are 2 things you smell? Maybe you are outside and can smell grass or flowers. Maybe you are in your home and smell coffee, or dinner cooking.

What is 1 thing you taste? What does the inside of your mouth taste like? Maybe it tastes like toothpaste, coffee, or your lunch.



Mindful drinking

The goal of mindful drinking is to see what you notice about the drink and the process of drinking it.

Choose a hot or cold beverage you enjoy. Sit in a quiet, comfortable place.

Before you pick up your drink, notice what it looks like resting on the table in front of you. For example, observe its colour, size, and shape.

Pick up the cup and notice how it feels in your hand. You can bring your attention to the weight, the temperature, the texture of the cup against your hand.

Next, hold the cup to your nose and see if it has a smell. Maybe you can feel the heat or coolness of the drink on your face when you hold it close. Maybe you notice how the liquid moves in the cup.

Finally, slowly take a sip from the cup. Notice the movement of your mouth, lips, tongue, and hand as you sip. Pay attention to the taste and temperature of the liquid in your mouth. As you swallow, can you feel your muscles working? Can you feel the liquid moving down your throat?

Continue to sip slowly on your drink. Focus all your attention on the drink for as long as you would like.



Body scan

To do a body scan, pay attention to all the physical sensations in your body without trying to change anything. The goal of a body scan is simply to notice what is present. While doing a body scan, you might or might not become relaxed.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. You might notice coolness, warmth, pressure, pain, something else, or nothing. Slowly move your attention up your body into your calves, thighs, hips, pelvis, stomach, back, chest, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and head.

Try to give yourself enough time in each body area to explore all the sensations present.

Once you scan from your feet to your head, you might want to scan back down from your head to your feet.

Go slow. Explore any sensations present.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Videos

Look online for videos and audio by Jon-Kabat Zinn, Vidyamala Burch, Tara Brach, and Elisha Goldstein.

Websites

[Palouse Mindfulness](#)

Take an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course online, free of cost. Available in English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese.



[UCLA Health](#)

Listen online to a variety of introduction meditations, free of cost. Read the text for each meditation. A 6-week online class is available for a fee.

[Mindful.org](#)

Read various articles on mindfulness. Offers training, courses, and Mindful Magazine for a fee.



Apps

Headspace

Explore this guide to everyday mindfulness. Offers hundreds of guided meditations to help with various areas such as sleep, productivity, and exercise. First 10 sessions are free of cost.

Breathr

Explore many guided meditations and practice exercises. Teaches mindfulness to beginners. Designed in Vancouver. Free of cost.

Insight Timer

Meditation app that includes a timer, guided meditations, courses, and calming music.

Books

You Are Not Your Pain by Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman

The Mindfulness Solution to Pain by Dr. Jackie Gardner-Nix

Full Catastrophe Living. Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics by Dan Harris

Stress Management

Stress is your body's automatic response to a difficult event or situation. The event or situation might be real, or imagined.

You feel tense, overwhelmed, worn out, or exhausted when stressed.

Stress is a normal part of daily life. A small amount of stress can motivate you. Too much stress can be bad for your health.

Stressors

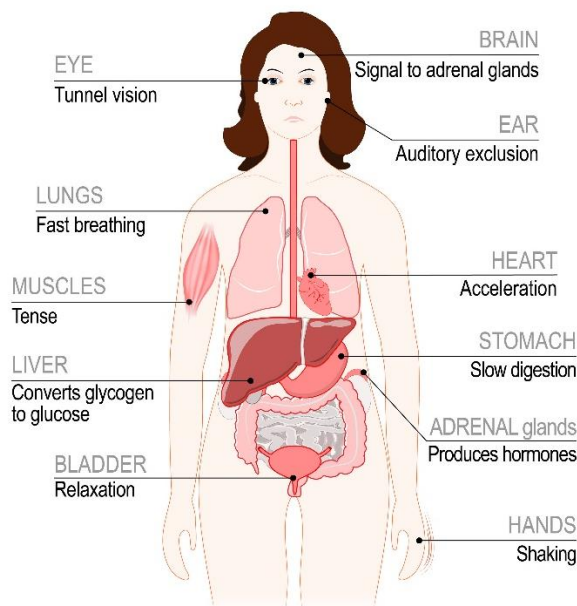
Stressors are the things that cause stress. They can be physical or emotional. Stressors might be a person, event, or thought, or something else.

Your body responds the same way to physical stressors and emotional stressors.

Stress response: fight, flight or freeze

- Occurs if danger signals are stronger than safety signals.
- Causes your body to release a surge of hormones. The hormones change the way your body is working. This change helps you fight, run away (flight), or shut down (freeze) from the danger
- Occurs if the stress is greater than the resources your brain and body have available.

Fight-or-flight response



Adobe Stock 222658385

Acute stress and chronic stress

Acute stress is brief. Stressors that last a short time, such as giving a speech or having an argument, can cause acute stress.

The symptoms of acute stress can be quite strong.

Chronic stress is long lasting. Stressors that last a long time, such as a difficult job or having chronic pain, can cause chronic stress.

You might not feel the symptoms of chronic stress in the moment. This is because you can become used to the discomfort. The feeling of stress becomes your new "normal".

Chronic stress is bad for your health. It makes it more likely that you will develop heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety and other conditions.

Stress and chronic pain

Stress and pain turn on the same areas in the brain. Because of this, stress and pain are very connected.

When you have stress, it can make your pain worse. When you have pain, it can make your stress worse by turning on the stress response.

Having chronic pain often gives you chronic stress. You enter a cycle of increasing pain and increasing stress.

Stress symptoms checklist

Have you had any of these symptoms over the last 2 weeks?

Physical

- ☐ Increased heart rate
- ☐ Increased muscle tension or muscle pain
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Dry mouth or dry throat
- ☐ Teeth grinding
- ☐ Nausea, indigestion or heartburn
- ☐ Vomiting
- ☐ Twitching or trembling
- ☐ Restlessness, tapping, or finger drumming
- ☐ Increased blood pressure
- ☐ Increased breathing rate
- ☐ Increased sweating
- ☐ Increased fatigue
- ☐ Decreased sex drive
- ☐ Increased or decreased sleep, nightmares
- ☐ Increased or decreased appetite
- ☐ Frequent weight changes
- ☐ Frequent colds

Mental

- ☐ Numbness or dulled senses
- ☐ Decreased attention or concentration
- ☐ Decreased creativity or productivity
- ☐ Decreased decision-making
- ☐ Decreased problem-solving
- ☐ Decreased memory or forgetfulness
- ☐ Frequently spacing out
- ☐ Negative attitude or self-talk
- ☐ Racing thoughts
- ☐ Poor judgment

Emotional

- ☐ Mood swings
- ☐ Anxiety, nervous laugh or worry
- ☐ Discouragement
- ☐ The blues
- ☐ Feeling sad
- ☐ Crying spells
- ☐ Decreased joy
- ☐ Loss of sense of humour
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Powerlessness

Behavioural

- ☐ Fidgeting, and pacing
- ☐ Having more arguments
- ☐ Drinking more coffee, tea, cola
- ☐ Withdrawing from others
- ☐ Overeating or loss of appetite
- ☐ Smoking
- ☐ Drinking alcohol or taking substances

Managing stress

There are 2 parts to stress:

1. **The stressor**, which is the person, event, thought etc. that brings on your symptoms.
2. **Your response** to the stressor.



You can manage your stress by changing the stressor, or by changing your response to it, or by changing both.

Changing the stressor

Time management

- Use a To Do List or appointment book to plan. Give yourself extra time so you are not rushed. Limit distractions.
- Prioritize your tasks.
- Break overwhelming or difficult tasks into smaller tasks.

Self-care

- Know your stressors.
- Identify what you can and cannot control.
- Do pleasant activities every day.
- Set boundaries to protect your self-care.
- Improve your communication skills.
- Learn to say “no” and to express what your needs are.
- Ask for help

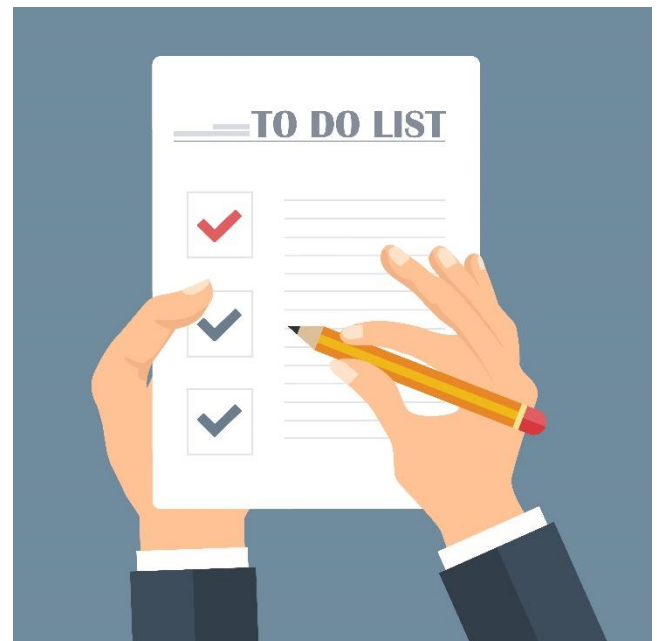


Image by pch.vector on Freepik

Changing your response

Awareness

Before you can change your response, you need to be able to identify when you:

- feel stressed
- have unhelpful thoughts
- feel body tension

You can learn how to become more aware of your body and feelings by practicing mindfulness. You might want to go back to the section on mindfulness and review.

Psychologist Tara Brach developed **R.A.I.N.** as a tool to practice mindfulness and compassion. You can use the tool when you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious.

R.A.I.N.

Recognize what's happening

- Bring awareness to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are affecting you

Allow yourself to experience things as they are

- Let your thoughts, emotions, feelings, and sensations simply be there,
- Try not to change, fix, or avoid them

Investigate with curiosity and care

- Be curious about the truth and direct your attention to the present moment

Nurture with self-compassion

- Respond to yourself and others with kindness
- Providing compassion to yourself just as you would a suffering friend.

Based on R.A.I.N. tool developed by [Tara Brach](#)
Image by [starline on Freepik](#)

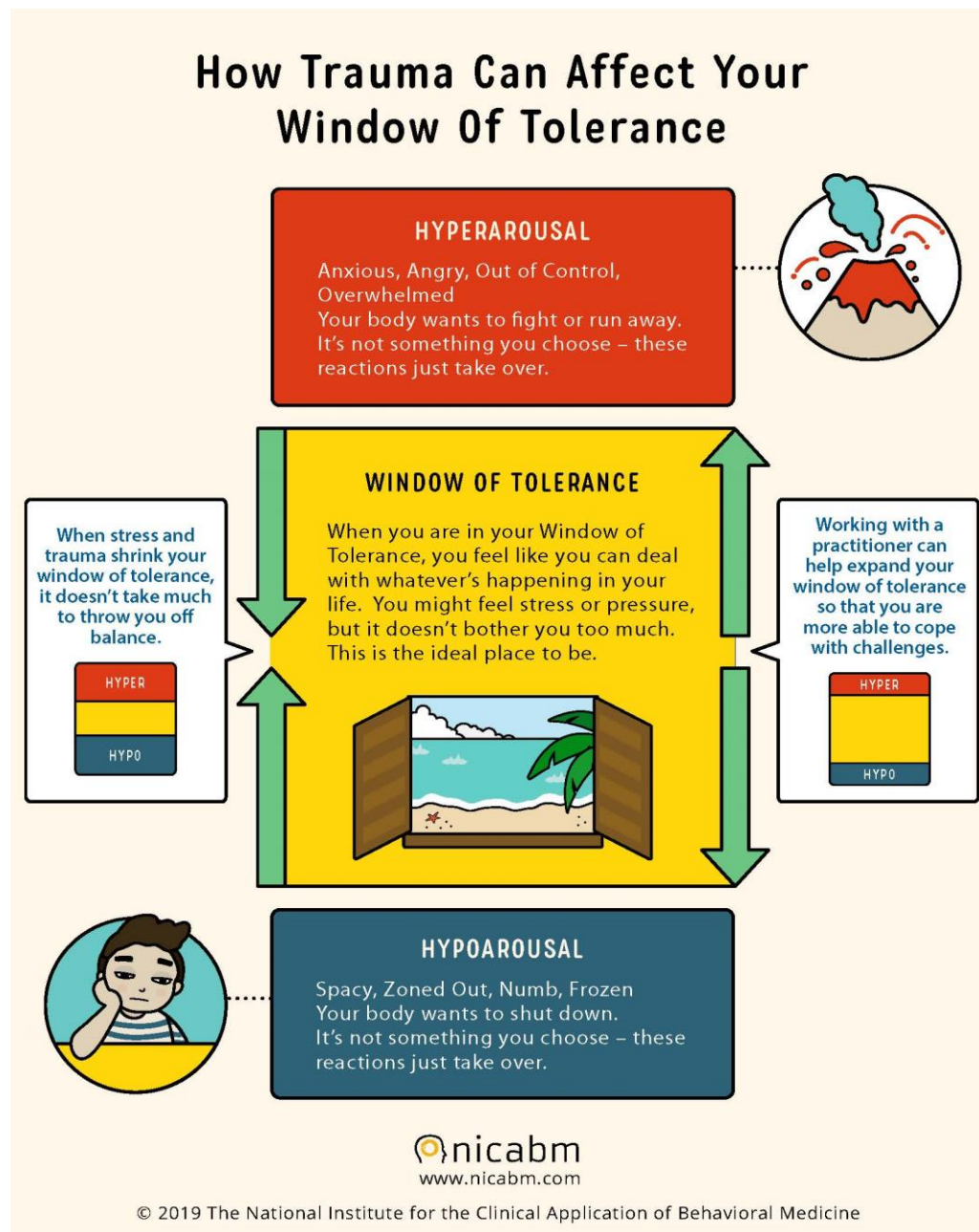
Resilience

Resilience means your ability to handle stress, and to protect yourself against future stress.

Being resilient means your **window of tolerance** is larger.

You can build your resilience by trying the following:

- Use your social supports. Connect with other people.
- Show gratitude. Consider writing in a gratitude journal.
- Give positive affirmations. Consider writing in a positivity journal.
- Meditate.
- Eat, exercise and sleep well.



Thoughts and beliefs

- Identify worrying or irrational thoughts. Replace them with thoughts that are more helpful.
- Keep things in perspective.
- Work on letting go of guilt and worry.
- Work on accepting that the world is less than perfect.
- Work on having the courage to be imperfect.

Relaxation

- Notice when you are tense.
- Make relaxation a priority and part of your routine.
- Schedule relaxation times.
- Set relaxation goals.

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques are a great way to help manage stress.

Using relaxation techniques can help your body have a relaxation response. When you bring on a relaxation response, you can reduce or turn off the stress response. The relaxation response activates your parasympathetic nervous system.

Relaxation is an intentional practice. It helps:

- lower your heart rate
- slow your breathing rate
- lower your blood pressure

Relaxation can also:

- reduce your anxiety
- improve your thinking
- increase your energy
- improve your sleep

Relaxation training

Relaxation training is like exercise for your nervous system. Thankfully, the nervous system can regulate itself and you can recover from chronic stress.

Studies tell us that relaxation can become a well-learned response. If you practice putting relaxation, it can become a habit.

Relaxation techniques are often free or low cost, have little risk, and can be done almost anywhere.

The keys to relaxation training include:

- relaxed body position
- quiet environment
- closed eyes
- gentle and non-judging thoughts

Types of relaxation training

There are a various types of relaxation training. It might take practice to find what type works for you.

Belly breathing

A technique where you focus on your diaphragm when you breathe. See the section on belly breathing.

Guided imagery

A technique where you imagine a positive, peaceful place like a beautiful beach or a peaceful meadow.

Progressive muscle relaxation

A technique where you tense and then relax different muscle groups in your body. This helps you learn where you hold tension. It also helps you learn what relaxation in a muscle feels like.

Autogenic relaxation

A technique where you repeat self-statements, words, or images about heaviness or warmth. Autogenic means self-regulated.

You can find more information on each of these techniques in the resource section.



[Image by katemangostar on Freepik](#)

Resources

Websites



[Anxiety Canada](#)

Read resources and learn about programs help you understand and manage anxiety. Learn about the MindShift app from Anxiety Canada and download it.

[Live Plan Be](#)

Find multiple stress management resources on this website from Pain BC.



[Stress Management - Healthlink BC](#)

Search topics on this website to find relaxation and stress management resources including meditation, breathing exercises, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery.

[Bounce Back](#)

Try this skill building program to help adults, and youth 15 years and older, to manage low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry. You can do the program online or by phone.



Apps

Calm: Sleep & Relaxation

An app for sleep, meditation, and relaxation. Includes sleep stories, breathing programs, stretching exercises, and relaxing music.

Books

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook

by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman and Matthew McKay.

[Positive Coping with Health Conditions](#)

by Dan Bilsker, Joti Samra and Elliot Goldner. Download this workbook free of cost by clicking on the title. Designed in Vancouver.

Crisis Line

The Fraser Health Crisis Line provides immediate, free, and confidential emotional support, crisis intervention and community resource information to people of all ages, 24 hours a day, every day. Call 604.951.8855 or 1.877.820.7444

Self-management handbook

Sleep Wellness

Adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Sleep helps you to restore physically and emotionally so that you can perform well during the day.

Getting less sleep than you need can affect many areas of your life.

Benefits of sleep

Pain

- Improved pain tolerance
- Lowered pain intensity
- Less sensitivity to triggers of pain

Brain health

- Better brain function including memory, decision-making, concentration, and problem solving.
- Improved ability to learn new information and skills

Mood

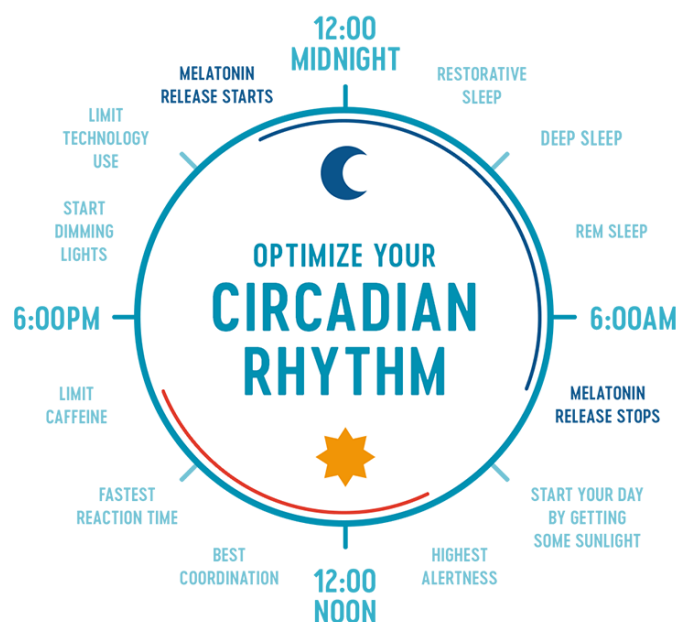
- Decreased stress hormones
- Lowered levels of depression and anxiety
- Improved emotional well-being

Immune function

- Improved function of the immune system
- Less likely to become ill
- Improved response to medications and vaccines

Physical health

- Improved repair after injuries to the body
- Increased energy levels
- Decreased risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke
- Less weight gain



Visualization of the circadian rhythm taken from www.liveli.com/blog/the-wave/circadian-rhythm

How sleep works

The **circadian** (say sir-kay-dee-un) **rhythm** is like a clock inside your body. It controls when you feel sleepy.

Light and darkness affect your circadian rhythm, which tells your body to make chemicals such as melatonin and cortisol.

Being in light during the day helps you to be more alert, awake, and active. As night comes and it gets darker, your body makes melatonin. This hormone helps you fall asleep, and stay asleep through the night.

You might get “jet lag” when you travel to a new time zone. This is because your internal clock has not yet adjusted to the new time zone. Working different shifts can also affect your circadian rhythm. It can cause sleep issues long term.

Sleep drive is your body's increase in pressure to sleep.

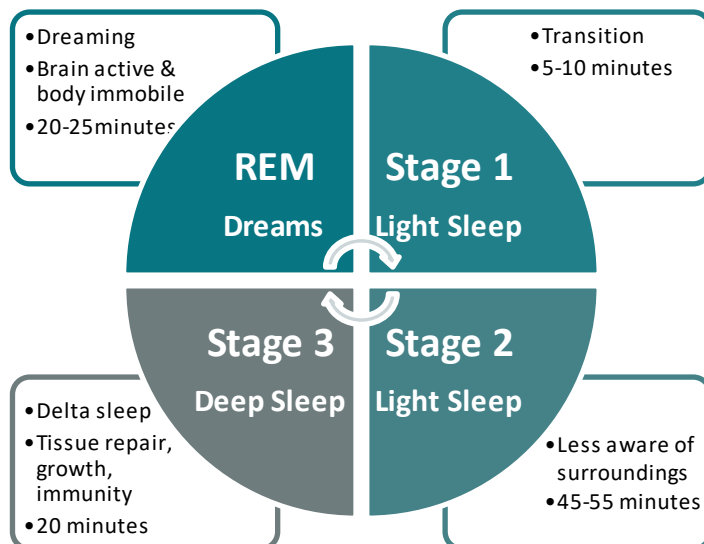
The longer that you are awake, the more your sleep drive builds up.

Physical activity also affects your sleep drive. When you do physical activity, your body releases a chemical called adenosine (say uh-den-uh-seen). As adenosine builds up, it increases your sleep drive.

Stages of sleep

When we sleep, we move through multiple sleep cycles. Each cycle lasts about 90 to 120 minutes. During each cycle, we progress from Stage 1 to Stage 3 and then to R.E.M. (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep.

As we move through the stages, it is normal to wake up 6 or more times. Most of these times we do not remember. If you are experiencing stress or pain, it might be more difficult to get back to sleep when you wake up.



Stage 1

This light stage of sleep is when you are between being awake and falling asleep.

You can still be aware of surroundings and easily awakened.

Stage 2

During stage 2 you are starting to become less aware of your surroundings. During this stage:

- Body temperature drops
- Breathing and heart rate start to slow

Stage 3

This is the deepest stage of sleep. It is difficult to wake up during stage 3. During this stage:

- Blood pressure and breathing slow down
- Muscles are more relaxed and receiving more blood supply
- Tissue growth and repair occurs and hormones are released
- Immune response can be activated to fight illness

R.E.M. Sleep

R.E.M. means **R**apid **E**ye **M**ovement. During this stage:

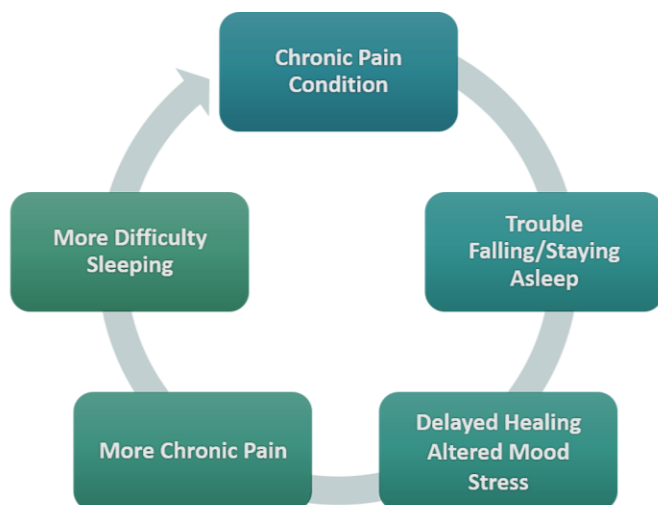
- Electrical activity in the brain increases
- Muscles are very relaxed and body does not move
- Energy is provided to the brain and body which helps daytime performance
- Dreams often occur

Sleep and chronic pain

Approximately 50% to 80% of people who have chronic pain also have difficulty with sleep. This is because poor sleep and pain affect each other.

Having chronic pain can increase the chance of sleep problems.

Having poor sleep can make you more sensitive to pain.



Sleep disorders

Insomnia

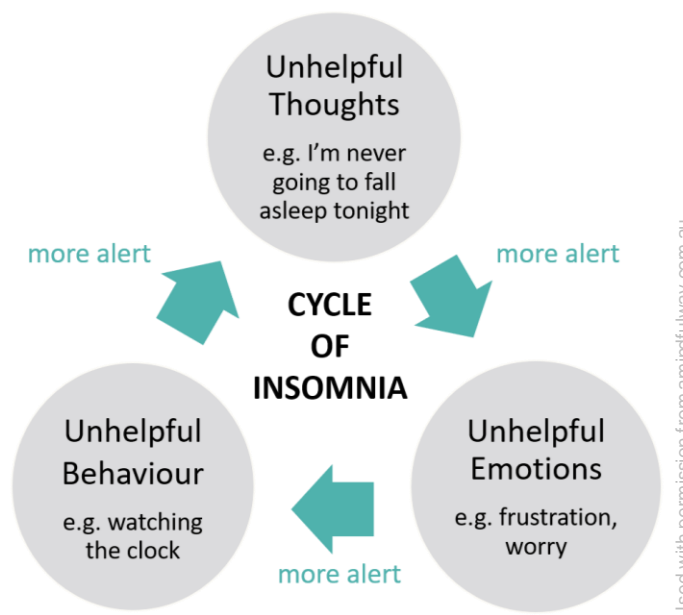
Insomnia is a persistent problem with sleep, which lasts more than one month. Insomnia can include:

- difficulty falling asleep
- difficulty staying sleep
- waking up too early
- not being able to return to sleep

Most people will sometimes have acute insomnia. It can be problem if it becomes chronic. Insomnia can lead to:

- negative thinking patterns around sleep
- anxiety
- tension when trying to fall asleep

Insomnia can also cause changes in habits that might lead to more difficulty with sleep.



Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea (say ap-knee-ah) is a sleep disorder where a breathing is interrupted during sleep.

Signs that you have sleep apnea include loud snoring, feeling tired all the time, and the observation that your breathing stops during sleep. The chance of you having sleep apnea is higher if you are of the male sex, and if you have high blood pressure, a large neck size, and a high body weight.

Sleep apnea can be a serious health issue. If you suspect you have sleep apnea, please speak to your family doctor.

Sleep management

Getting back into a regular sleep-wake cycle takes time and effort. Look at the things in the following section that can affect sleep. Decide if there are things that you can change.

Writing in a sleep diary for 1 to 2 weeks might be helpful.

When you make a change, allow enough time for it to take effect.

Daytime habits

Caffeine

Try not to have drinks with caffeine, medications that have caffeine, and foods with caffeine such as chocolate, in the 6 hours before your bedtime, or after 2:00 pm. Caffeine might block your sleep drive.

Nicotine

Try not to have nicotine 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. Nicotine can make it difficult to sleep. This is because it can increase your heart rate and breathing rate.

Smoking

Try not to smoke for several hours before bed. Smoking speeds up brain waves and increases the level of stress hormones in your body. This can last for several hours after smoking.

Alcohol

Try not to have alcohol 4 hours before bedtime. Alcohol makes you sleep lighter. It also breaks up your sleep by stopping you from entering deep sleep.

Large or spicy meals

Try not to eat big or spicy meals right before bedtime. They can cause indigestion that makes it hard to sleep. Instead, have a small snack 45 minute before bedtime if you are hungry.

Exercise

A lack of physical activity can lead to poor sleep. Physical activity helps build your sleep drive. Studies have found that being active within your abilities can help with the deep stage of sleep. The deep stage of sleep is when your body restores itself.

Try not to do hard exercise too close to your bedtime. Instead, do something relaxing like stretching or yoga.

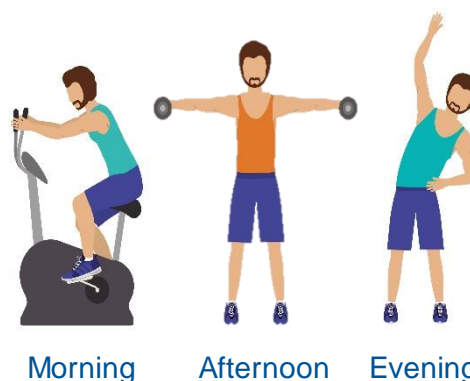


Image by qimarc on Freepik

Environment

Try to sleep in a place that is good for sleep. A room that is dark, quiet and cool (15 to 20°C) makes it easier to sleep.

Sleep routine

A bedtime routine helps you fall asleep by alerting your brain that it is time for sleep. Start your bedtime routine at the same time each day if possible. Do the steps to your bedtime routine in the same order every day.

Try things like calm music, aromatherapy, meditation, and deep breathing to wind down from your day. This helps prepare your mind and body for sleep. Taking a warm bath or shower, journaling, reading, drinking herbal tea, practicing gratitude, and preparing for the next day are common strategies.

Thinking about sleep

Having negative thoughts about sleep can cause you to have problems such as anxiety, tension, and increased stress hormones. These things can cause poor sleep. They can also make having a bad sleep more stressful.

Try using mindfulness to shift from “something is wrong” to “this is how my body is sleeping right now.”

Watch out for unhelpful thinking, such as the following.

- Assuming the worst about what will happen with sleep changes
- Assuming the worst about the meaning of sleep changes
- Thinking that sleep changes are permanent or you cannot fix them.
- Blaming everything on not having enough sleep.

Electronics and light

Light effects your sleep cycle. When light enters your eyes, your melatonin decreases. When you are in darkness, your melatonin levels increase.

To help your circadian rhythm you can do the following.

- Be in light when you wake up.
- Avoid bright lights before your bedtime.

Electronics might be too stimulating at bedtime. You want to have your brain wind down at bedtime. About one hour before bedtime, stop using your cell phone, tablets, television, computers, and other electronics.

Ways to Reduce Blue Light



Replace bedroom lightbulbs with softer, red-orange coloured lighting or candlelight



Install F.Lux on your computer to change screen hue



Switch to night mode on your devices



Wear blue-light blocking glasses

Icons by flaticon lamp laptop moon glasses ©Fraser Health

Sleep reset

Studies tell us that the following are the most beneficial ways to improve your sleep.



Get up at the same time, every morning

To keep your internal clock regular, get up at the same time each morning. Even if you did not sleep well at night, get up at the same time. Also, get up at the same time on weekends. This is the most important step to reset your sleep pattern.

Allow 20 minutes to fall asleep

If you are not asleep after 20 minutes:

1. Get out of bed and go somewhere in your home with low lighting.
2. Do a relaxing activity that works that works for you. It could be belly breathing, listening to soothing music, or reading something calm. Try not to have screen time.
3. When you feel sleepy, return to bed.

Repeat these steps until you fall asleep. Do these steps even if you wake up in the middle of the night. This will help your brain connect your bed with falling asleep.

Do not use your bed for other activities such as reading or watching shows.

Avoid naps

Until your sleep is more regular, try not to nap, even after nights when you have had little sleep.

You will likely feel tired during the day. Fight off the urge to nap and you will feel ready to sleep by bedtime. Do not go to bed earlier than usual.

Sleep programs

If you have used these sleep strategies and still have difficulty falling asleep, you might want to try a more structured sleep program. You can do sleep programs on your own with a workbook, online, or in person with a professional.

Let your doctor know about your sleep concerns. Tell your doctor about the steps you are taking to improve your sleep.

Cognitive behaviour therapy for insomnia

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Insomnia, which is also called CBT-I, works for 3 out of 4 people with insomnia. Studies tell us that people fall asleep faster, wake up less during sleep, and stay asleep longer. These benefits often lasted over time.

- **Cognitive interventions:** Change inaccurate and unhelpful thoughts about sleep.
- **Behavioural interventions:** Relaxation training, stimulus control by linking bed to sleep, and sleep restriction by limiting time in bed.
- **Psychoeducational interventions:** Providing information about the connection between thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and sleep.



**Acceptance commitment therapy
for insomnia**

Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) is another psychological program for treating insomnia. Studies have shown it can improve sleep quality in patients with insomnia and reduce severity of insomnia long term.

ACT uses acceptance and mindfulness to improve psychological flexibility. It involves techniques that help you to notice, and become comfortable with, the thoughts and feelings you have around sleep.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Sleep Diary

Habits Prior to Sleep							Sleeping Patterns					
Date	Naps •time •length	Caffeine Cigarettes Alcohol •day total •time last used	Activities •in the 3 hours before bed	Daytime Tiredness •0-5 (5 is the most tired)	Ready for Sleep •0-5 (5 is relaxed, 0 is tired) • Sleep aid	In Bed Activities e.g. reading	Lights Out •time	Time to Sleep •approx. # mins until you fell asleep	How Often You Woke •# of times •longest time awake	Morning Wake Time	Total Hours of Sleep	Refreshed Score •0-5 with 5 feeling very rested
02/23	2PM 20mins	Alcohol x2 10PM	TV x 3hrs	3	3 SA 9PM	Reading	11PM	30mins	4 20mins	5:30AM	~5.5hrs	2

TV = Television
S = Screen time
R = Reading
W = Walking
E = Exercise

C = Caffeine (coffee, tea,
energy drinks, chocolate liquors)
SA = Sleep aid (any medications or
supplements to help sleep)
Cig = Cigarettes (cigarettes, cigars, vaping)
A = Alcohol (beer, wine, hard alcohol)

Your abbreviations:

_____ = _____
 _____ = _____
 _____ = _____

Resources

Videos



[Live Plan Be – Pain BC](#)

Watch various videos and read articles about how to improve sleep for people with chronic pain.

[Vancouver Anxiety Canada – \(CBTi\)](#)

Watch one hour video of Dr. Korol, Psychologist in Vancouver sharing strategies to help you get a good night's sleep.



Websites



[Kelty's Key](#)

Take a free, self-paced, online course to learn how to manage insomnia.

[Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute](#)

Watch a series of short modules about how to manage sleep and chronic pain.



[Anxiety Canada](#)

Read a short article with sleep tips for improved sleep.

Apps

Insight Timer Includes sleep meditations, sleep stories and music to promote sleep.

Headspace Includes sleep stories, meditation, and relaxation.

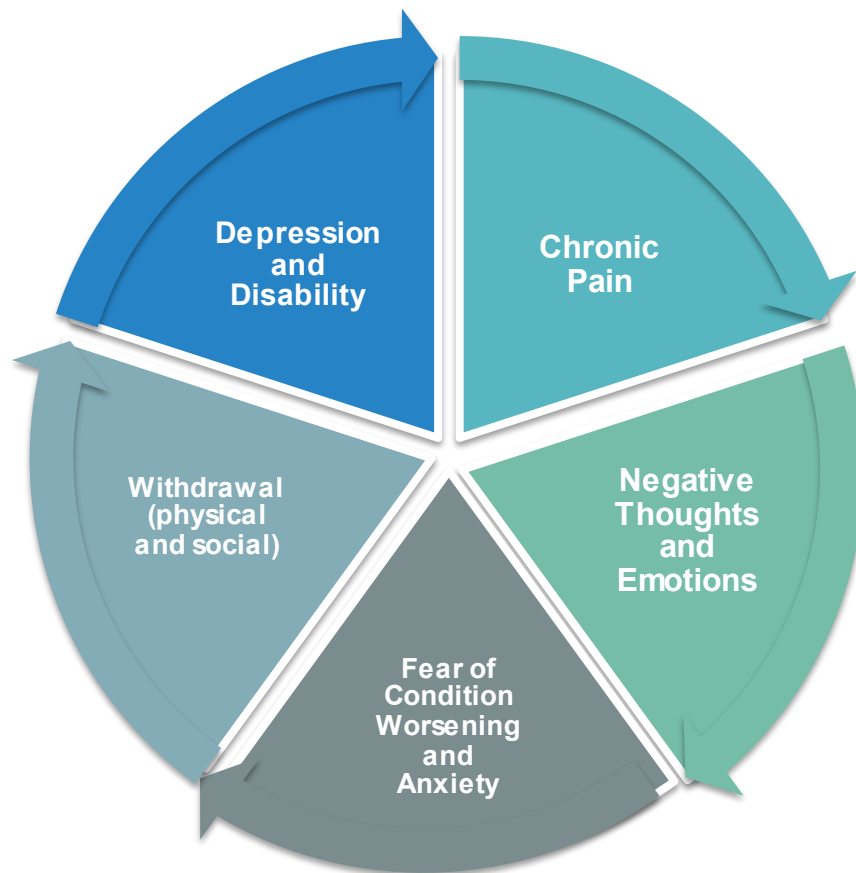
Books

The Sleep Book. How to Sleep Well Every Night by Guy Meadows. A step-by step program using ACT principles

The Insomnia Workbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Sleep You Need by Stephanie Silberman. A step-by-step program using CBT principles

Managing Moods

It is normal to have emotional changes when you have persistent pain. Certain thoughts can bring on specific emotions. Your thoughts and emotions can affect the sensitivity of your pain system.



Pain and mood

Depression and anxiety are common among people living with persistent pain.

- In a recent Canadian survey, more than half of people said that their chronic pain contributed to their depression and anxiety. About 1 in 4 people said that they experience feeling that “life isn’t worth living”.
- In the USA, studies have found that up to 85% of people with chronic pain have severe depression.

Risk factors for mood disorders

People with persistent pain are more likely to have depression and anxiety if they have:

- Family history
- Past trauma
- Stress that lasts a long time
- Susceptible personality type
- Medical conditions
- Change and loss (work, relationships, or identity)
- Lack of support

Automatic negative thoughts



Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) are ideas your brain comes up with quickly, without your reasoning.

Many people do not notice when they have ANTs, but they do notice the negative emotion that comes with them.

Do you have ANTs?

Common patterns of negative thinking when you have persistent pain include:

- **Catastrophizing:** Believing something is the worst it could possibly be.
- **“Should” statements:** Thinking in terms of how things should, must, or ought to be.
- **All or nothing:** Seeing things as “either or” or “right or wrong” instead of in terms of degrees.
- **Jumping to conclusions:** Making negative conclusions of events that are not based on fact.
- **Mental filtering:** Focusing only on the bad and ignoring the good.

Writing down your thoughts might help you keep track of your ANTs.

Mood management tools

Many strategies can improve your mood. Often people will use several of these strategies to get the greatest benefit. There is a lot of research showing the following strategies can help manage your mood.

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Mindfulness
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Scheduling pleasant activity

Acceptance and commitment therapy

Acceptance and **C**ommitment **T**herapy (ACT) is a type of therapy that uses an action-oriented approach. ACT was developed by psychologist Steven C. Hayes. Acceptance, commitment, and mindfulness strategies help you learn new ways of doing things.

The main goal of ACT for persistent pain is to help you improve your quality of life by clarifying your values.

Hexaflex of ACT Model,
developed by
Psychologist Steven C.
Hayes, 1982.

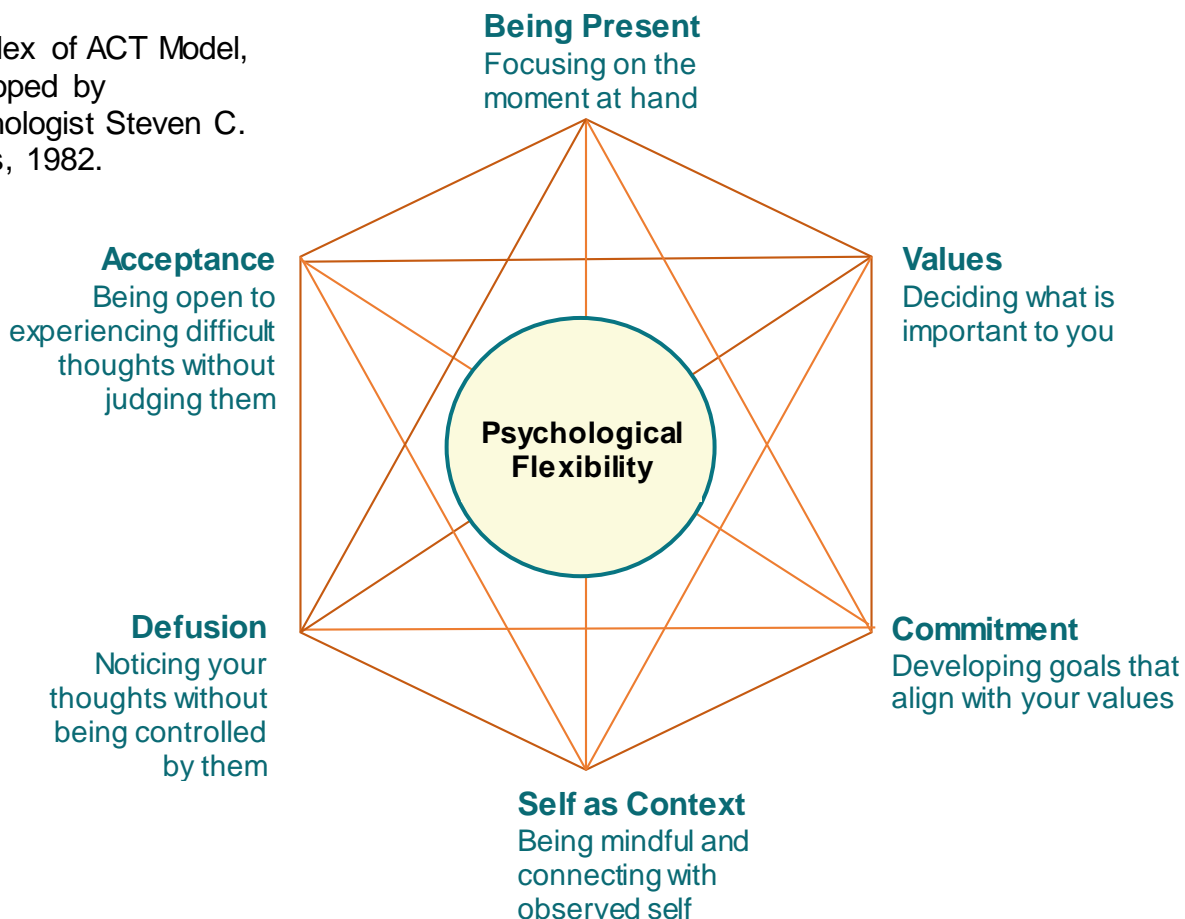


Image created by @Fraserhealth based on work of Steven C. Hayes 1982.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can teach you to accept your thoughts, feelings, and emotions without judgment or feeling you need to fix it. Mindfulness training helps you be less reactive to your pain and improves your pain sensitivity. It can also lead to better mental clarity, focus and problem solving.

In the Stress Management section, you learned about Tara Brach's **R.A.I.N.** as a tool to practice mindfulness and compassion. You can use the tool when you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious.

R.A.I.N.

Recognize what's happening

- Bring awareness to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are affecting you

Allow yourself to experience things as they are

- Let your thoughts, emotions, feelings, and sensations simply be there,
- Try not to change, fix, or avoid them

Investigate with curiosity and care

- Be curious about the truth and direct your attention to the present moment

Nurture with self-compassion

- Respond to yourself and others with kindness
- Providing compassion to yourself just as you would a suffering friend.

Based on R.A.I.N. tool developed by Tara Brach. Image by [stairline on Freepik](#)

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Cognitive **B**ehavioural **T**herapy (CBT) is a type of therapy that can help you replace ANT's with thoughts that help to improve your mood.

CBT can help change how you view pain. It can also help reduce the negative response from the brain that can make pain worse.

CBT is a well-known treatment for anxiety and depression. Researchers have found that it is also one of the best psychotherapies for treating pain.

CBT involves learning to identify the exact thoughts that trigger your negative moods. Next, you decide how true those thoughts are. You then have the option of replacing them with different or balanced thoughts. With practice and effort, it becomes more natural to think positively and you will see your mood get better.



Positive Affirmations

Positive affirmations are believable statements that you say out loud to yourself, often while looking in the mirror, to increase your self-esteem, positivity, and gratitude. They have been shown to improve mood.

Sample positive affirmations for pain

I am listening and learning from my pain.

I am choosing peace every day regardless of how much pain there is.

I am more than my pain.

I am thankful for healing.

I am learning new skills and trying my best.

My body is resilient and strong.

I am learning to move freely again.



Image by [Freepik](#)

Getting help

Start with speaking with your doctor or any other health care professional that you feel comfortable speaking with. They can provide you with direction on next steps and help you find the support you need.

Psychologists, clinical counsellors, and other mental health professionals can help you learn how to live life with chronic pain.

If you need immediate support, the following are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- Fraser Health Crisis Line: 604-951-8855 or toll-free 1-877-820-7444. Trained volunteers provide toll-free telephone support and crisis intervention counselling.
- Crisis line for Indigenous peoples: 1-800-KUU-US17 (588-8717). Provides culturally sensitive support and counselling to Indigenous peoples.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

CBT Activity: Catching ANTs

Situation	Catch It! Identify Thought		Check It! Is the thought unhelpful? Why?	Challenge It! Helpful Thought
Went for a long walk and my pain flared.	I can't do anything anymore and walking must be bad for me!		Yes. It makes me more scared of moving and exercising and I know that moving is good for me.	I am hurting more because I overdid it. I know this is only temporary. Next time I will make sure to pace myself.

Resources

Websites



[Pain BC](#)

Read articles and watch videos about [emotional wellbeing](#) and [depression](#) for people with chronic pain.

[Anxiety Canada](#)

Get free online, self-help, and evidence-based resources on anxiety.



[Mental Wellness FHA](#)

Learn more about what Mental Wellness is and what it means to you.

[FHA Mental Health Programs](#)

Find mental health programs and resources in Fraser Health.



[Wellness Together Canada](#)

Learn about mental health, and substance use, and get links to services available. Funded by the Government of Canada.

[Here to Help](#)

Explore strategies to help you take care of your mental health and use substances in healthier ways, and learn how you can support a loved one.



On-Line Courses



[Kelty's Key](#)

Receive free and confidential online therapy service. Get tailored treatment from an online therapist, or work on your own with our self-help resources.

[ACTivate Your Life](#)

Try this on-line self-help course from Wales Public Health site. A beginning step for those who are looking to develop skills and actions to improve mental health and well-being.



[BounceBack Program](#)

Learn from this program that provides help to adults with mild to moderate depression, low mood or stress. Delivered online or over the phone with a coach.

Books

[Antidepressant Skills Workbook](#) Self-help workbook for managing depression by Dan Bilsker and Randy Paterson. Click on title for free download.

The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns

Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing How You Think by Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky.

Three out of four Canadian adults are exposed to a traumatic event in their lifetime. Trauma is commonly divided into these three types.

- [illegible]

Rates of PTSD are higher for people with chronic pain.

Trauma and pain

Symptoms of PTSD

Chronic pain changes your brain and nervous system. Often this leads to your pain system becoming oversensitive and overprotective.

- Having nightmares, thoughts, or memories of the event(s) when you do not want to.
- Trying hard not to think of the event.
- Avoiding people, places or situations that remind you of the event.
- Feeling disconnected from people and your surroundings, or feeling numb.
- Feeling on edge and on guard, and startling easily.

There is treatment for trauma and PTSD. If you have trauma or PTSD, treating it might improve your pain experience.

What to do if I think I have PTSD

A good place to start is speaking with your doctor or any health care professional you feel comfortable speaking with. They can provide you with direction on next steps and help you find the support you need.

Your doctor might make a referral for you to go to a psychologist or psychiatrist. If you are not able to get a referral from a doctor, you can do the following:

- Make an appointment with a psychologist or other mental health professional for further assessment.
- Contact your local mental health centre. Go to www.fraserhealth.ca and search for “mental health centres.”

Self-compassion

Self-compassion means having the same compassion towards yourself that you would give to a friend or loved one who is suffering or going through a difficult time.

Self-compassion involves treating yourself with understanding and kindness rather than judging yourself harshly.

Self-compassion also includes realizing that everyone goes through times of suffering, failure, and imperfection. These are all part of the shared human experience.

To build self-compassion:

- Practice self-kindness instead of self-judgement when you are suffering.
- Take a balanced approach to your negative emotions. Use mindfulness to observe your feelings without exaggerating or suppressing emotions.
- Remind yourself that suffering is part of the shared human experience.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Websites



[ACES Too High](#)

Read news reports on research about adverse childhood experiences.

[Trauma, PTSD and Chronic Pain - Pain BC](#)

Read an article about trauma, PTSD, and chronic pain.



[Wellness Together Canada](#)

Choose from a variety of resources including learning tools, counselling, and a community of support. Resources provided at no cost.

[This Way Up](#)

Explore a variety of courses and coping tools, including an 8-lesson course for PTSD based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.



[PTSD Association of Canada](#)

Read a variety of resources and personal stories. This website is for those who suffer from or are at risk for PTSD, and those who care for traumatized individuals.

[Understanding PTSD - Veterans Canada](#)

Read answers to many common questions about psychotherapy, and learn the role of specific health professionals.



Programs



[Surrey Women's Centre](#)

Get a wide range of crisis, court and counselling services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and other forms of family violence. They also run SMART, a 24-hour mobile crisis service.

[British Columbia Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse](#)

Learn about therapeutic services for males who have been sexually abused at some time in their lives.



[Moving Forward Family Services](#)

Find free short-term counselling and/or low cost long-term counselling by telephone and online.

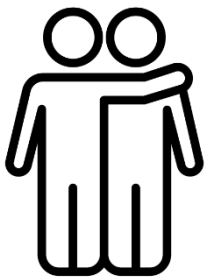
[Mood Disorders Association of British Columbia](#)

Find a weekly peer support group on PTSD. Free of cost.



Healthy Supports and Communication

Healthy supports are people who provide you with practical or emotional support. Healthy supports are a basic human need. The Biopsychosocial Spiritual Model (see section on Understanding Pain) states that social connection is key to our health and personal growth.



Created by Lakshisha
from Noun Project

Social connection requires having good relationships with people in your environment. It can be many people or only a few.

It can also include pets.

Social connection and healthy supports have many benefits, including:

- Emotional support and caring
- Healthy physical growth
- Help with daily activities
- Resilience building

You have probably met people who are both supportive, and unsupportive. Being clear on what you are looking for in others can be helpful as you develop social connections and healthy supports.

On the right is a list of supportive and unsupportive traits that you might notice in other people.

Supportive traits

- Asks what you need
- Encourages you to look after yourself
- Follows through with plans
- Provides accountability
- Acts positive and uplifting
- Motivates and energizes you
- Listens without judgment
- Shows interest in you and your well being
- Believes your experiences
- Accepts you and your boundaries
- Acts trustworthy and honestly

Unsupportive traits

- Negatively affects your emotional or physical health
- Lacks empathy, for example, says “Get over it”
- Agrees to do something but does not do it
- Ignores or oversteps boundaries
- Tells you what to do
- Acts or speaks critically, or judges or blames other people
- Does not believe you
- Yells or says things that make you feel bad about yourself
- Makes you feel exhausted after being with them
- Does not accept responsibility for their own actions
- Says they will do something, but does not do it
- Says things that are not true, and you cannot trust them

The following can help build your healthy supports:

- knowing which traits are most important to you
- strengthening and building the supports you already have
- finding ways to meet new supportive people
- communicating effectively



Image by pch.vector on Freepik

List one or more people in your life who are already healthy supports. Then list at least one way you could acknowledge or strengthen this relationship in the next 2 weeks.

If you do not feel you have someone already in your life who is a healthy support, what actions can you take in the next 2 weeks to begin to connect with supportive people?

Communication

Communication means an exchange of information between people through common symbols, signs, or behaviour.

Chronic pain can affect the supportive relationships you have. It can also affect how you communicate with the people around you.

When you have chronic pain, difficulties with communication can include:

- Being distracted by the pain or not feeling present.
- Feeling irritable and feeling that people are not listening or understanding you.
- Feeling as if people do not believe you. This might lead to withdrawal.
- Feeling like a burden to others. This might lead to not asking for help.
- Having impulsive thoughts and emotions and regretting them later.
- Feeling ignored or that people are tired of hearing about your pain. This might lead to not expressing yourself.
- Assuming that people should be able to read your mind and know what you want, think or need.
- Finding it difficult to explain your needs or what you want to say.

When you do not express how you feel emotionally, you might:

- Feel misunderstood.
- Feel as if your needs are not being met.
- Have your feeling hurt.
- Have increased physical pain.
- Have negative emotions.

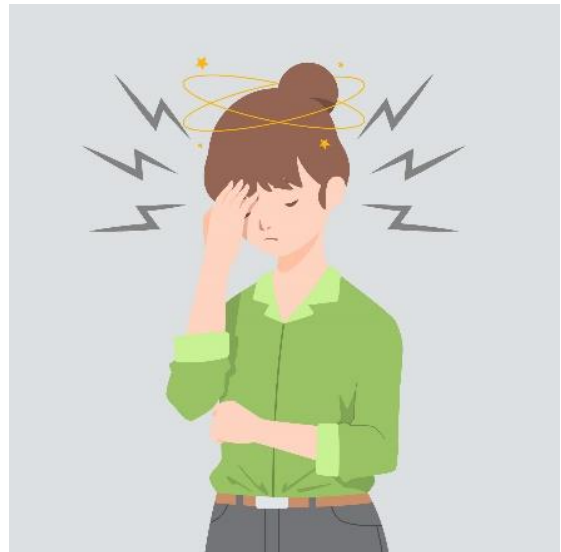


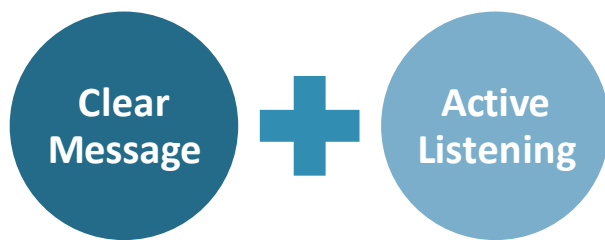
Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

Effective communication

Effective communication is a learned skill. It can help you have deeper connections with other people. It can also improve your emotional and social wellbeing.

Effective communication means understanding the meaning and emotion from the information you are given. It occurs when both people understand each other.

Effective communication has two main parts:



There are three skills used in effective communication.

Skill #1 Assertiveness

- Say what you want, think, and feel, clearly and calmly. Speak in an authentic and open way that shows respect.
- Know what you are saying before you speak. Be decisive.
- Use statements that start with “I” to turn negative thoughts into positive feelings. For example, “I love it when you help me make dinner”, versus, “You never make dinner with me”.
- Be specific with what you want to get out of the exchange. Do you want support, or advice?

Traits of assertiveness

- Clear
- Good eye contact
- Confident body language
- Appropriate speaking volume
- Steady tone of voice
- Appropriate hand gestures and posture



Image by pch_vector on Freepik

Skill #2 Active listening

Active listening helps you understand the meaning and emotion behind what is said. It makes the other person feel heard, understood, and accepted. This can make your relationship stronger.

Traits of active listening

- Be present and give all your attention to the speaker
- Try not to interrupt
- Be curious and interested in what is being said
- Avoid judging the speaker or what is being said
- Use your own words to repeat what the person said and say it back to them. Ask questions to clarify if needed.

Skill #3 Boundary setting

Setting boundaries can be a helpful tool for communicating your needs. It can also help your self-confidence and protect your physical and mental wellbeing.

You can use this helpful formula to help you set boundaries assertively.

Boundary Setting Formula

1. I feel _____
(Describe emotion)
2. When you _____
(Describe person's behaviour or situation)
3. Because _____
(Describe the effect of you experiencing that)
4. Would you be willing to _____?
(Make your request)

Example:

"I feel upset and frustrated,

When you call me at 11pm at night,

Because my sleep is interrupted, and that increases my pain.

Would you be willing to call me before 8pm instead?"

Tips for communicating pain

Understand your chronic pain and how it affects you. This will help you clearly explain it to friends, family and other people.

Show people your self-management worksheets, learning modules, and videos instead of having to explain it to them. You might want to practice together.

- Agree how and when you will indicate your pain is bad, before you have pain.
- Try a non-verbal communication system, like a smiley face system on your refrigerator, to avoid repeating conversations.
- Choose a comfortable place and pick a good time, such as when you feel well, for important conversations.
- Try doing relaxation and breathing techniques before you have to communicate important things.
- Set limits on how long you can actively participate in a conversation.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Websites to find supports



[Pain BC - Support and Wellness Groups](#)

Connect with a group of people living with pain and build a community of support while learning about pain. Groups are free of cost and meet twice a month.

[Pain BC - Support Line](#)

Speak to someone about your pain, or the pain of someone you care for. Get free information and support.



Websites on communicating with healthcare providers



[Assert Yourself](#)

Learn to be assertive when you communicate by completing the 10 modules in this workbook.

[Pain BC - Effective Communication Tips for People in Pain](#)

Read a short article with tips for communicating with health care providers, family and friends.



[Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute – Pain U Online](#)

Learn from modules on communication with healthcare providers, friends, family, and at work.

[Help Guide – Effective Communication](#)

Read article outlining effective communication skills and strategies.



Moving Forward

Loss and grief

Grief is the way you react to loss.

- Grief is a normal and natural process but can be difficult to work through.
- It can affect your emotions, thoughts, and behaviour. It can even affect how you feel physically, including making pain worse.

Living with persistent pain can lead to many small and big losses, which can add up over time.



Ambiguous grief is the loss of parts of your life such as loss of your sense of self, confidence, sense of freedom or control of your life. Describing or resolving these things is not easy.

Anticipatory grief is your feelings of grief even before a loss occurs. It includes things like a loss of plans for the future, or dreams, due to unexpected changes in your life.

Acknowledging your losses and your feelings of grief can help you to process your grief. You then can move through the stages of grieving.

The six stages of grief

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler developed the “Six Stages of Grief” model. It explains the process of grief with a major loss like the end of a relationship or loss of job. It also applies to the ambiguous and anticipatory grief that comes with living with chronic pain.

Each stage involves a range of emotions. You need to move through these emotions to grieve your loss.

The Six Stages of Grief



Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Finding meaning...

Based on the work of Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

The authors explain that grief is not a straight line. It is often like a roller coaster where you go through the different stages, back and forth, as you process the loss.

Denial - A state of shock and refusal. It provides a healthy buffer for you to catch up with reality.

Anger - An emotional experience. An acknowledgement that this was not how you wanted life to go.

Bargaining - Feeling like you will do anything for life to be what it once was.

Depression - Emotional changes at a very deep level. It is an appropriate response to a loss or a life-changing situation.

Acceptance - Acknowledging there has been a change or loss and taking a step to move forward. You find control in acceptance.

Finding Meaning - A way to live with the loss, develop resilience, and continue to live a meaningful life despite the sadness. Having a greater appreciation for the things that bring value and joy to your life.

How to move forward with grief

- Acknowledge your losses and grief.
- Use your self-compassion and self-care tools.
- Connect with the people who are your supports to let them know how you feel. Speak to a healthcare provider if you feel stuck.
- Identify what is important to you. Spend your time on the things and people that bring meaning to your life.
- Explore your personal values.

Personal values

Your values are key beliefs that guide and motivate your thoughts, attitudes, choices, and actions.

- The type of person you want to be.
- The way you treat yourself and others.
- The way you interact with the world around you.

Life can be more content and satisfying when you know your values. You respect your values through choices and actions that honour them.

*It is not hard to make decisions
once you know what your values are.*
- Roy E. Disney

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Values Checklist

Below are some common values. You may think of others that aren't on the list.

Put a ✓ beside the values that are **most important** to you.

Acceptance or self-acceptance	To be accepting of myself, others, life, etc.
Adventure	To be adventurous; to actively explore novel or stimulating experiences
Assertiveness	To respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
Authenticity	To be authentic, genuine, and real; to be true to myself
Balance	To have mental and emotional steadiness
Beauty	To have the qualities of a person or a thing that give pleasure to the senses
Caring or self-care	To be caring toward myself, others, the environment, etc.
Compassion or self-compassion	To act kindly toward myself and others in pain
Connection	To engage fully in whatever I'm doing and be fully present with others
Contribution or generosity	To contribute, give, help, assist, or share
Cooperation	To be cooperative and collaborative with others
Courage	To be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
Creativity	To be creative or innovative
Comfort	To feel ease, strength, and hope
Curiosity	To be curious, open-minded, and interested; to explore and discover
Discipline	To have orderly or regimented conduct or pattern of behavior
Diversity	To be open to differing or variable elements or qualities
Effort	To produce something through exertion or trying
Encouragement	To encourage and reward behavior that I value in myself or others
Excitement	To seek, create, and engage in activities that are exciting or stimulating
Fairness and justice	To be fair and just to myself or others
Family and friends	To have caring, meaningful relationships with others
Fitness	To maintain or improve or look after my physical and mental health
Flexibility	To adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
Freedom and independence	To choose how I live and help others do likewise
Friendliness	To be friendly, companionable, or agreeable toward others
Forgiveness or self-forgiveness	To be forgiving toward myself or others
Fun and humor	To be fun loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
Gratitude	To be grateful for and appreciative of myself, others, and life
Health	To be in a state of thriving or doing well
Honesty	To be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
Imagination	To use the mind to form new ideas and images
Industry	To be industrious, hardworking, and dedicated
Intimacy	To open up, reveal, and share myself, emotionally or physically

Kindness	To be kind, considerate, nurturing, or caring toward myself or others
Learning	To acquire knowledge or skill by instruction or study
Love	To act lovingly or affectionately toward myself or others
Loyalty	To be faithful toward another person, cause, ideal, or custom
Mindfulness	To be open to, engaged in and curious about the present moment
Nurturance	To provide affectionate care and attention
Order	To be orderly and organized
Patience	To go through difficulty or strain calmly and without haste
Peace	To be in a state of tranquility or quiet
Persistence or commitment	To continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
Play	To enjoy exercise or activity for amusement
Productivity	To be effective in bringing about results
Respect or self-respect	To treat myself and others with care and consideration
Responsibility	To be responsible and accountable for my actions
Risk	To have a possibility of loss, injury, or hazard
Safety and security	To secure, protect, or ensure my own safety or that of others
Sensuality and pleasure	To create or enjoy pleasurable and sensual experiences
Sexuality	To explore or express my sexuality
Simplicity	To enjoy a state of being simple or uncomplicated
Skillfulness	To continually practice and improve my skills and apply myself fully
Spirituality	To have a deep sense of belonging and connectedness relating to something bigger than oneself
Spontaneity	To do or say things freely and naturally
Stability	To be steady in purpose and not easily changed
Supportiveness	To be supportive, helpful and available to myself or others
Trust	To be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable
Wisdom	To be able to see beneath the surface of things
Other	

The top 5 values that are important to me are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3 other values that are important to me are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Adapted from the TAPMI with permission 2021. <https://tapmipain.ca>

Life Compass: A moving forward activity

Step 1:

In the main part of each large box, write a few key words about what is important or meaningful to you in this part of life. What sort of person do you want to be? What sort of personal strengths and qualities do you want to build? What do you want to achieve?

If a box seems irrelevant to you, just leave it blank. If you are stuck on a box, then skip it, and come back to it later. It is okay if the same words appear in several or all boxes because this helps you identify core values that cut through many parts of life.

Family, Relationships

Health, Self-care

Spirituality

Leisure, Recreation

Personal Growth

Work, School, Community

Step 2:

In the upper small square inside each box, mark on a scale of 0 to 10 how important these values are to you, at this point in your life. 0 means no importance. 10 means extremely important. It is okay if several squares all have the same score.

Step 3:

In the lower small square, mark on a scale of 0 to 10 how effectively you are living by these values right now. 0 means not at all. 10 means living by them fully. Again, it is okay if several squares all have the same score.

Step 4:

Look at what you've written. What does this tell you? What is important in your life? What might you currently be neglecting? When looking over this document, imagine how to bring these different values into your life.

Resources

Videos



[Pain BC Chronic Pain Anger and Grief](#)

Watch a one hour webinar on managing anger and grief related to chronic pain.

Websites

[Canadian Grief and Bereavement Resource Repository](#)

Explore links to online support for coping with different types of grief.



[CAMH Loss grief and healing](#)

Learn about different types of losses and traumas, and how to move forward.

[BC Bereavement Helpline](#)

Connects to grief support services within BC. Free of cost.



[CFS and Fibromyalgia Grieving Your Losses](#)

Tips for responding to health-related loss and grief.

[Institute for Chronic Pain](#)

Read article on Finding Hope in Acceptance.



Books

It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand by Megan Devine, 2017.

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by Martha Hickman, 1994.

The Grief Recovery Handbook, 20th Anniversary Expanded Edition: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses including Health, Career, and Faith by John Hames, 2017.

A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters by Steven Hayes, 2020.

When Life Hits Hard: How to Transcend Grief, Crisis, and Loss with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by Russ Harris, 2021. [Chapter 1 Preview.](#)

Nutrition and Pain

We choose the foods we eat for a variety of reasons including taste, convenience, cost, pleasure, comfort and nutritional value.

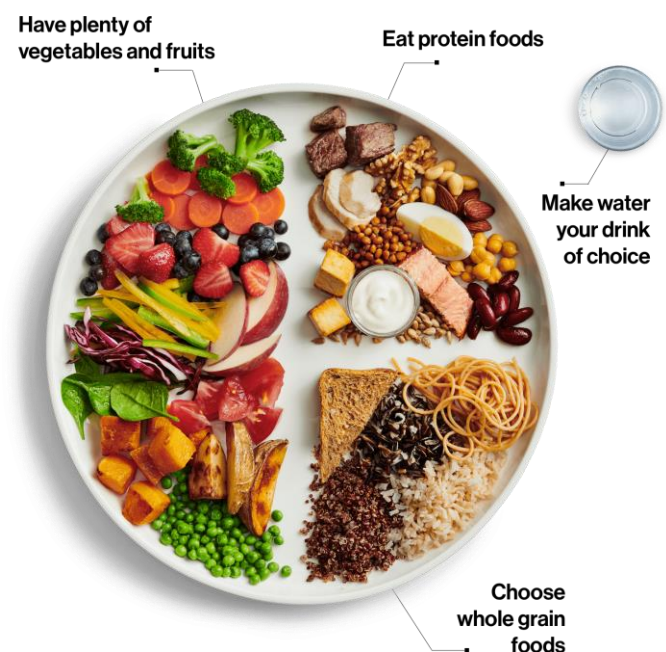
Healthy eating

- Include a **balance** of foods from each food group in your meals. Each food group contains different nutrients that your body needs to function properly.
- Include a **variety** of different foods each day to give your body a variety of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.
- Practice **moderation** by getting familiar with your body's hunger and fullness cues.
- Eat **regular meals**. Avoid going a long time without eating.
- Be sure to **enjoy** the foods you eat. Having a good relationship with food is an important part of healthy eating.

Canada's Food Guide

Use the healthy plate image from Canada's Food Guide to plan and prepare your meals. Include enough vegetables and fruit to cover $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate. Prepare enough protein foods such as fish, tofu, beans or low-fat meat to cover $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate. The other $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate should be whole grain foods like whole wheat pasta or whole grain bread.

The image below shows the amounts recommended. If you are mixing the foods together to make a stew or soup, try to follow the same amounts of each food group.



Canada's Food Guide is a great visual guide to some of the aspects of healthy eating.

From Canada's Food Guide Dietary Guidelines and available at [food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/](https://www.food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/)

Constipation

If you are less active than you used to be, or if you have changed how you eat, you may become constipated. Many pain medications can also cause constipation.

High fibre foods

Eating foods that are high in fibre can help prevent constipation. Here are some examples of high fibre foods that can help prevent constipation:

- ✓ Bran
- ✓ Psyllium
- ✓ Many fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Whole grains such whole grain bread or brown rice
- ✓ Beans and lentils

When buying breads or cereals, read the label. Aim for 4g fibre or more per serving.

Be sure to drink plenty of water. Fibre and water work together to promote a regular bowel pattern and a healthy gut.



Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

Physical activity

Activity can also help you have a regular bowel pattern. Try increasing your activity by walking more or even stretching. You might want to review the section on Movement so you know how much activity is right for you.



Image by Freepik

Laxatives

If you still have frequent constipation after trying some of the tips above, you might need a laxative. Talk to your doctor.

Inflammation and pain

Inflammation is your body's response to injury and harm. Inflammation helps you heal, but sometimes you can have too much inflammation. Many things can increase inflammation, such as poor diet, food allergies, food sensitivities, food intolerances, environmental toxins, and stress.

Some studies suggest that chronic inflammation might be a cause of chronic pain.

Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Highly processed foods, including the foods listed below, can increase inflammation. Try to eat less of them.

- ✗ White bread
- ✗ Candy bars
- ✗ Chips
- ✗ Sugar

Foods high in saturated fat, including the foods listed below, can also increase inflammation. Try to eat less of them.

- ✗ Cheese
- ✗ Beef, pork and other meats
- ✗ Butter

Unsaturated fats, often called healthy fats, can help reduce inflammation. These fats are found mostly in plant foods and fish, such as:

- ✓ Avocado
- ✓ Nuts
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Olive oil
- ✓ Fatty fish, like salmon and sardines

A few studies have shown that turmeric, ginger, dark chocolate, and green tea might reduce inflammation. Scientists still don't know if these foods actually help.

Be cautious with what you read

The information you read online or in books about anti-inflammatory diets can be misleading. There may be lists of foods that you are told to avoid, such as gluten, milk products, soy and more. You do not need to avoid all these foods. You only need to avoid foods you have an allergy, intolerance or sensitivity to.

Food allergies, sensitivities and intolerances can cause more inflammation in your body. If you think you have a food allergy, sensitivity, or intolerance, talk to a dietitian or your doctor. See the Resources section for how to connect with a dietitian.

What is the difference between a food allergy and a food intolerance?

Food allergies can cause a wide variety of symptoms in different parts of your body. Your immune system causes the reaction.

Food intolerances cause symptoms in your gut. For example, if you have lactose intolerance your body does not have the enzyme called lactase that breaks down lactose in your gut. This causes you to have gas and diarrhea.

Vegetables and fruit

Include vegetables and fruit in your meals and snacks. Many vegetables and fruit contain antioxidants, which can protect your cells against damage. They also contain vitamins and minerals, and fibre.



Image by [pch.vector on Freepik](#)

Water

Drink water when you are thirsty and with meals. If you become dehydrated, you might be more sensitive to pain.

Thirst is often mistaken for hunger, and you might find that you have fewer food cravings when you are well-hydrated.

Supplements

Eat a wide variety of healthy food to make sure your body gets all the vitamins and minerals it needs. People with chronic pain are sometimes low in vitamin D, vitamin B12, and magnesium. Ask your dietitian or doctor if you should be taking any vitamin or mineral supplements.

Protein

Including protein with meals and snacks helps you feel full longer. It also keeps your blood sugar more stable. This can help your mood and make you feel better. It also gives you more energy.

Most people should aim for 20 to 30g of protein per meal. Some people with certain medical conditions might need more, or less protein. A chart showing how many grams of protein are in some common foods is on the next page.

Plant sources of protein

If you don't already eat plant sources of protein, consider trying them. Protein from plant sources is high in fibre, and vitamins and minerals. It can also be more affordable than meat. Search online for recipes with these proteins or other beans:

- ✓ Lentils
- ✓ Chickpeas or garbanzo beans
- ✓ Tofu
- ✓ Black beans
- ✓ Kidney beans

Make sure you eat enough of these protein foods. One and a half cups of chickpeas has the same amount of protein as 3oz of chicken breast (which is about the size of the palm of your hand).

What about protein bars and protein powders?

When your pain or tiredness makes it difficult to prepare a meal, protein bars or powder can be an easy source of protein.

When choosing a bar or powder, pick one that is low in sugar. Read the ingredients list and chose one that has ingredients you recognize.

Protein in sample meal plans

Including animal protein

Meal	Food	Protein (grams)
Breakfast	2 eggs	12
	2 slices whole grain toast	6
	1 cup skim milk	9
Lunch	¾ cup cottage cheese	23
	½ cup whole grain crackers	5
	½ cup canned peaches	
Snack	½ cup sliced cucumber	
	¼ cup mixed nuts	5
	1 piece fruit	
Supper	3 ounces salmon	22
	¼ cup wild rice	3
	½ plate green salad	
Snack	1/3 cup hummus	7
	½ cup baked pita chips	2
Total:		94 grams

Plant-based protein

Meal	Food	Protein (grams)
Breakfast	1 scoop veg. protein powder	25
	½ cup frozen fruit	
	2 tsp chia seeds	2
Lunch	1 cup edamame	17
	½ cup whole grain crackers	
	½ cup cherry tomatoes	
Snack	½ cup sliced cucumber	
	¼ cup mixed nuts	5
	1 piece fruit	
Supper	green salad with veggies	5
	¼ cup pumpkin seeds	10
	½ cup chickpeas	7
Snack	1/3 cup hummus	7
	½ cup baked pita chips	2
Total:		85 grams

Saving money

When you plan meals in advance, you waste less food. You are also less likely to go to a restaurant or order meal delivery.

If planning meals is new for you, start with dinners for just 2 or 3 days. Check what you have in your fridge and freezer, and try to use those foods first. Write the dinners on a blank piece of paper or a menu planner and post it where you will see it.



Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

Before you go grocery shopping, make a shopping list.

Try to shop when your stomach is full so that you are less tempted to buy unnecessary food. Buy only the items on your list.

Buy frozen vegetables. They are usually cheaper than fresh, and they are just as nutritious.

Many grocery stores now have apps they use to sell food that would otherwise go to waste. The food is often sold at very low prices. Check online for the apps.

See the Resources section for a link to detailed information on where you can get food free or at a reduced price in your community.

Preparing food

When making meals, you might want to cook extra portions and put them in your freezer. You can heat them up on days when you don't feel like cooking.

If you have a crock pot, make one-pot meals. You can find many recipes online. Crock pots make preparing meals easier because you add the ingredients and then leave it until it is ready to eat. Make extra and put in to individual containers and freeze.



Image by macrovector on Freepik

Air fryers can also simplify meal preparation. You can cook almost anything in them without needing to stir or flip the food. You can cook extra portions for another day. Freeze your protein, vegetables, and whole grains separately, or in one package as a meal.

See the section on Energy Conservation for more tips on how to save your energy as you prepare meals.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Connect with a dietitian



[Dietitian Services HealthLink BC:](#)

Speak with a dietitian at HealthLink BC by calling 811, or use web-based services to get food and nutrition information, education and counselling. Service is free.

[Hospital or clinic dietitian](#)

Ask your doctor for a referral to an [outpatient dietitian](#) at a clinic or hospital. Service is free with your BC Services Card.



[Private practice dietitian](#)

Search online for a private practice dietitian. There is a cost for their service but if you have an extended health plan, it might include the cost for dietitian services. You can also read blogs written by dietitians.

Contact your local grocery stores and ask if they have dietitians doing healthy eating tours for the public.

Lower cost and free food sources



[Free and Low Cost Foods.](#)

Find where you can get food at a low cost or free in local communities.

[Quest Food Exchange](#)

Buy groceries at a low cost. Open to people who have a lower income or who are disabled, with a referral. Ask one of your healthcare providers or other support providers to write a [referral](#) for you.



[Healthy Eating on a Budget](#)

Get tips on how to eat healthy while living on a limited income.

Websites

[Canada's Food Guide](#)

Explore Canada Food Guide and browse new recipes.





[Healthy Plate](#)

Use this Healthy Plate as a guide to plan healthy balanced meals.

[Plant Proteins](#)

Learn more about plant-based foods and how to prepare them.



[Protein: South Asian](#)

Find a list of protein foods and tips on how to incorporate them into South Asian foods.

[Guide to Heart-Healthy Label Reading](#)

Learn how to read the Nutrition Facts label found on food items and includes definitions for the specific terms that are used.



[Managing Constipation in Adults](#)

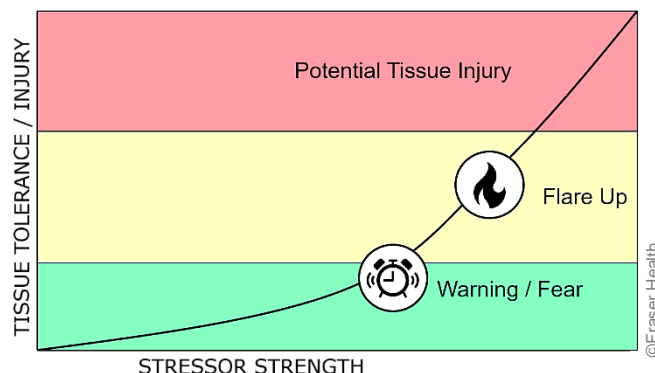
Read this two-page resource with information on constipation, foods to help prevent it, and laxatives.

Self-management handbook

Flare-Up Plan

Flare-ups are common. They are also predictable and manageable.

Having a flare-up plan will help you to use strategies to get you through difficult times. A plan will also give you some control over your pain. Flare-ups might settle more quickly if well managed.



Part 1: Preventing a flare-up

What are the warning signs that a flare up is starting?

muscle tension, numbness, headache

Major aggravator #1

(mood, emotion, thought, movement)

Lifting heavy things

Plan to Avoid

Proper lifting technique, break up load, ask for help

Major aggravator #2

(mood, emotion, thought, movement)

Plan to Avoid

Major aggravator #3

(mood, emotion, thought, movement)

Plan to Avoid



Part 2: Managing a flare-up

Tools to use to minimize flare-up intensity:

eat, ice, epsom salt bath

Consider the following in your plan. Be specific about how long and how often.

Rest:

Physical activity:

Meditation and
relaxation:

Thoughts:

Health care team
support:

Family, friends, work,
school:

When I feel better, my back on track plan will be:

I will start by walking for 10 minutes instead of my usual 15 minutes

I will reward myself when the flare up settles by:

I will spend extra time at the park with my friends

Review

Did your prevention plan work? Why or why not? Problem solve and write down your new ideas.

Did your management plan work? Why or why not? Adjust plan and try again next time.

References

Developing a flare up plan by the Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute
Flare Up Plan by the Pain Management Network

Icons from Flaticon [clock](#) [flame](#)

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt and cope with difficulties. It is about how you navigate the ups and downs of life's challenges.

Having resiliency does not mean that you do not go through the difficulty or the distress - you still do. However, it means that you have the resources you need to cope with life's challenges.



Image by storyston Freepik

Coping with life challenges

Your childhood, culture, society, and the amount of stress you have in your life, as well as other things, influence the methods you use to cope with life challenges. By the time you are an adult, your coping methods have often become a habit and are automatic.

We all use both healthy and unhealthy coping methods. It is helpful to reflect on whether the coping methods you are choosing to use are helping you live well. Your coping methods should align with your values.

Healthy coping

- Exercise
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Talk therapy
- Relaxation techniques
- Healthy eating
- Supportive relationships
- Pleasant activities and hobbies
- Gratitude or mindset
- Compassionate self-talk
- Humour and creativity
- Goal setting and habit tracking

Unhealthy coping

- Alcohol
- Gambling
- Overeating
- Self-Medicating
- Isolating or withdrawing
- People pleasing
- Over scheduling
- Unhelpful thinking
- Numbing-out or distractions
- Avoiding or procrastinating
- Denial

You can build your resilience

Your brain is able to heal and grow. Neuroplasticity allows your brain to build new pathways that are resilient. Below are six ways to help build your resilience.



Mental space

Having mental space involves freeing your mind from being overloaded with thoughts, and creating time for the following.

- Self-awareness: thoughts, emotions, behaviours, needs.
- Reflection: dream, learn, plan, set goals. Being open minded and looking at things from multiple perspectives.

To build mental space:

- Practice mindfulness
- Write a journal
- Set aside time so you can be alone with your thoughts, to reflect on your values, needs, and goals
- Seek out different perspectives

Hope

Hope is the good feeling you have when you see – in your mind’s eye – a path to a better future.

Hope is a powerful helper to keep you going in difficult times.

To build hope:

- Spend time with people who have a positive attitude
- Read or watch inspirational media
- Think about the positive things you have achieved
- Do not define yourself by your setbacks

Balance

Being intentional with how you spend your time will help you to have balance.

Distractions such as social media and the internet have a sneaky way of stealing your time. Balance the time you spend on your physical, mental, social and spiritual needs.



Created by visual language
from the Noun Project

To build balance:

- Remember the principles of pacing
- Set some boundaries
- Identify your values. Think about where you are spending your time and energy. Adjust as needed.
- Have a weekly check-in.

Connection

Connection is a sense that you belong and you are accepted.

Having a connection is more than having a relationship. It means you feel seen, heard, and valued. The relationship makes you feel energized and stronger.

Resilience can come from authentic connections with yourself, others, a higher power, or even the universe.



To build connection:

- Connect socially with people
- Connect emotionally with yourself and others
- Connect physically with your body
- Connect spiritually with your purpose or meaning

Gratitude

Gratitude means being thankful, and having a readiness to show thanks and to return kindness.

There are two key parts to practicing gratitude:

- Affirm the good things you have received.
- Acknowledge the role other people play in providing your life with goodness.



To build gratitude:

- Keep a gratitude diary
- Practice gratitude meditation
- Write a gratitude letter or note to someone
- Use gratitude gestures
- Practice gratitude affirmations

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Gratitude Activity

I'm grateful for...

Write down 5 things that you are grateful for.

I'm learning...

Write down a challenging situation, person or obstacle that you faced.

Write down what you are learning from it.

Sending good vibes...

List 3 people who brought joy to your life today. It could be friends, family or even strangers. Send them some good vibes!

Today was...

Choose one moment of your day that made you happy.

Focus on it for a few minutes before you go to sleep.

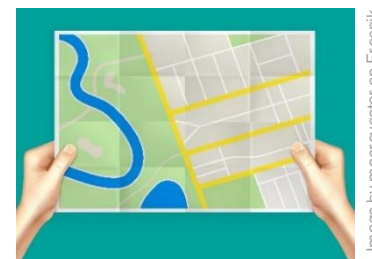
I am looking forward to...

Write down something you are looking forward to today. Write down something you are looking forward to this week.

My Pain Management Roadmap

This roadmap is a tool to help you continue the plan that you have made during the program. You can write down your goals and monitor your progress.

Resources are included at the end of this section to help guide you with your self-care plan.



My action plans for the week: Moving towards my goals

Choose what is important to you	My self-care plan
<p>Physical (your body)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Movement <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Eating</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pacing and Energy Conservation</p> <p>Psychological (mood and thoughts)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Managing thoughts <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Stress management: mindfulness, breathing, relaxation</p> <p>Social</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Supports</p> <p>Spiritual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Connection <input type="checkbox"/> Values or Meaning</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Self-Compassion or Gratitude</p>	<p>How will I move forward with the things that are important to me?</p> <p>My goals are:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p>S.M.A.R.T. Goals</p> <p>Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Timely</p>

Action plans this week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	How did it go?
Movement <i>Walk 3 x for 10 minutes after breakfast M/W/F.</i>	✓		<i>Felt unwell.</i>		✓		✓	<i>OK - walks were manageable</i> <i>Sub'd one day</i>
Stress management <i>Breathing Practice daily for 5 min at 10 pm.</i>	✓	<i>Forgot.</i>	✓	<i>On the phone then forgot.</i>	✓	✓	✓	<i>I did pretty well.</i> <i>Hope to make it a daily habit.</i>
Sleep <i>Stop screen time 2 hours before bed.</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓		<i>This is hard! Will try again next week.</i>

Referrals and appointments Moving forward	When? Where? Is there anything I need to do?
My community referrals Example: Pain BC Coaching for Health, Pain BC Wellness & Support Group, support line	
My follow-up appointments Example: Primary care provider, specialist, pain team member	

Resources

Websites



[Pain BC.](#)

Learn about pain, talk to someone, and find pain-related resource.

[Live Plan Be](#)

Find multiple stress management resources on this website from Pain BC.



[Retrain Pain](#)

Watch various one minute on the science behind pain.

[Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute – Pain U Online](#)

Complete the learning modules called Pain U Online. Watch the learning module on Pain Education.



Apps

Insight Timer Includes sleep meditations, sleep stories and music to promote sleep.

Mindshift Try strategies to reduce anxiety based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Helpful Tools



[Live Plan Be Toolbox from Pain BC](#)

Check out this collection of online, print, and in-person resources for chronic pain management.

[Tame the Beast](#)

Learn to retrain your brain. How you think about pain can change the way it feels.



[Healthline – Box Breathing](#)

Learn deep breathing, also called square breathing, as a way to reduce stress. This website uses a short video and step-by-step instructions.

[Kelty's Key – Chronic Pain](#)

Learn more about chronic pain through nine self-paced courses on chronic pain.



[LivePlanBe – Setting Goals](#)

Set goals to make positive change with goal setting and planning tools.

Community Resources

[Self-Management BC](#)

Gain knowledge and skills in these free health programs for people with ongoing health conditions. Programs offered in person, virtually, online, by telephone, or by mail.



[BC Pain Support and Wellness Groups](#)

Join a support and wellness group. Groups meet online, twice a month and are free of cost.

[Pain BC Telephone Support Line](#)

Connect by phone or email to receive free information, emotional support and resource assistance to empower people living with pain and their loved ones to improve well-being and advocate for themselves.



[Pain BC Coaching for Health](#)

Talk to someone regularly with this free telephone-coaching program designed to help you learn pain self-management skills, regain function and improve your well-being.

[Fraser Health Mental Health](#)

Find mental health and substance use services for you or someone you care for.



[Fraser Health Pain](#)

Resources to help you manage your pain and access pain care.



My action plans for the week: Moving towards my goals

Write your week's action plans that will help you move toward your goals.

In the last column, write how it went and any changes you would make for next week.

Action plans this week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	How did it go? Add or change anything?
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								

Self-care menu:

- Movement
- Sleep wellness
- Healthy eating
- Energy conservation (pacing, planning, prioritizing)
- Resilience (self-compassion, joyful activities, habit tracking, positive self-talk)
- Stress Management

- Mindfulness
- Managing moods and thoughts Healthy supports and communication
- Connection
- Values or meaning
- Self-compassion or gratitude

S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant
Timely

Icon By Christoph Roser at AllAboutLean.com



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Specific
Measurable
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Timely

Icon By Christoph Roser at AllAboutLean.com

Community and Online Resources

Pain management

Pain BC - painbc.ca



- [Live Plan Be \(+\)](#) –Videos and articles developed by PainBC to learn about pain management
- [Coaching for Health](#) – Free telephone coaching service. Ask your healthcare provider to make you a referral for this service.
- [Pain Support Line](#) – Free information, emotional support, and resource connection. Phone: 1-844-880-7246
- [Pain Support and Wellness Groups](#) – Connect online with other people living with chronic pain

Self-Management BC – selfmanagementbc.ca



- Self-management programs for chronic pain and other chronic diseases offered free in communities
- Coaching for health is offered in various languages. Phone: 604-940-1273

Kelty's Key - keltyskey.com/self-help



- Web-based self-management modules for chronic pain, insomnia, grief, and more
- Handouts and audio recordings to assist with various topics. Some recordings are offered in various languages

Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute (Pain U) –

tapmipain.ca/patient/managing-my-pain/pain-u-online/#/



- Self-paced modules on topics related to chronic pain. Examples of topics include pacing, sleep, and communication.

Pain management - *continued*

Osteoarthritis Service Integration System (OASIS) – oasis.vch.ca



- Self-management for people with arthritis
- In-person and virtual classes on topics related to arthritis including sleep and stress management, meditation, nutrition, pole-walking and specific arthritis classes such as shoulder, hip, or knee.

Arthritis Society – arthritis.ca/support-education/arthritis-talks-webinars



- Free webinar series on current, evidence-based information. Topics are related to lifestyle, medications, surgery, and various types of arthritis.

Power Over Pain - poweroverpain.ca



- Free articles, videos, podcasts, courses, workshops, and peer support for youth and adults

Mood management

CBT Skills - cbtskills.ca



- An 8-week class on improving your mental health. Includes practical tools to recognize, understand, and manage patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving.
- Ask your health professional for a referral to this service

The Antidepressant Skills Workbook - psychhealthandsafety.org/asw



- Self-care workbook for step-by-step guidance to changing patterns that trigger depression. Helps you emerge from depression and make it less likely to recur.
- CBT based. To be used alongside other treatment options. Offered in various languages.

Anxiety Canada - anxietycanada.com



- Free online, self-help, and evidence-based resources on anxiety
- Free MindShift app can be downloaded. Helps manage anxiety, using step-by-step strategies based on psychological treatment

Fraser Health Mental Health and Substance Use Services – fraserhealth.ca/mentalhealth



- A variety of mental health and substance use programs that cover a wide range of services

Bounce Back - bouncebackbc.ca



- Free skill-building program to help adults and youth 15 years and older manage low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress, or worry
- Delivered online or over the phone with a coach. Offers tools to support you on your path to mental wellness

Wellness Together Canada – wellnesstogether.ca/en-ca



- Articles, webinars, and peer support groups for mental health and substance use
- Free counselling services available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

Movement and exercise

Pain BC Gentle Movement @ Home – painbc.ca/gentle-movement-at-home



- Free Gentle Movement @ Home recordings provide guided movement and relaxation for people living with pain
- Sessions led by physiotherapists and other therapeutic movement professionals. Designed to help people with persistent pain learn to feel safe to move again

Taoist Tai Chi – taoist.org/pain-relief-through-taoist-tai-chi-arts



- Articles about how Taoist Tai Chi arts can help people with chronic pain. It is also a form of meditation that calms the nervous system and the brain
- Register for sessions

Y Thrive Program – youtube.com/@ymcahome



- Free at-home exercise videos, including the “gold” series that are gentle and you can do while seated

Choose To Move – Free Access through the [community leisure centres](#) or the [YMCA](#)



- Online or in person physical activity coaching program for people ages 55+, based on research evidence that helps break down barriers to physical inactivity

PABC Find a Physio – bcphysio.org/find-a-physio



- Search for a physiotherapist in your local community
- Choose the areas of practice (Chronic Pain) that you are looking for as well as the maximum amount of distance you would travel from your home

Community Leisure Centres – do a google search for ‘leisure centre’ and your city or community name

- Each community centre offers a variety of programs ranging from gentle yoga to high-impact classes, with land and pool-based options
- Classes taught by professionals.
- Costs are generally lower than a private facility. Check to see if they have a subsidized leisure pass

Other resources

BC 211 – bc.211.ca

- Provides information and referral to a broad range of community, government, and social services that assist with basic needs like food and shelter, mental health and addictions support, legal and financial assistance, support for seniors, and more

HealthLink BC 811 - healthlinkbc.ca/more/contact-us/8-1-1



- Free health information and advice phone line
- A health service navigator can help you find health information and services, or connect you directly with a registered nurse, a registered dietitian, a qualified exercise professional, or a pharmacist

