

Pathways for easing persistent pain

Consumer Brochure

Persistent pain is a common problem that many people experience. There is a lot of information and resources available. Your health professional might be giving you this information to help you find a path to lessen your pain and improve how well you function to make life more enjoyable.

If you have pain that persists it can be hard to know what you can do about it. It can feel confusing and frustrating when the initial injury has healed but you continue to experience the pain. The pain is very real. It can impact every aspect of your life and make it difficult to do basic tasks.

There are no quick fixes. Pain medicines and other single strategies are unlikely to help on their own. The first steps are to learn about how persistent pain works and to seek treatment from the right health professionals. This brochure gives you a brief overview of why pain can persist, what you can do to improve how you feel, move and function, and further resources that are available.

Why can pain persist?

Pain is there to protect us. Our brain and nervous system send pain signals to indicate when there is possible danger in our bodies. For example if you break a bone or burn yourself with boiling water. Most of the time the pain goes away once the injury has healed. In persistent pain the body keeps sending these pain signals despite there being no remaining injury or danger. To lessen this type of pain, you need to retrain your body and brain to stop sending these signals. >



What makes your pain personal and unique?

Your thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all impacted by pain. In the same way, what we think, feel, and do also shapes our experience of pain. For example, pain can trigger forgetfulness and make it harder to focus. Feeling depressed and helpless can make the pain feel worse, while positive feelings can reduce the feelings of pain. Similarly, the fear of pain can lead us to behave differently, such as limiting our movement, which can increase the pain.

Past experiences of trauma will also influence the way you experience pain. Trauma can create difficult emotions that can ramp up our pain alarm system. Becoming aware of these buried emotions and releasing them can help to reduce pain. Working out what might trigger, increase, or reduce your pain, can help guide strategies to lessen your pain.

How do I re-train my pain system?

Let's be realistic – medicines and other single strategies are unlikely to help on their own. These five things in combination are the most useful way to improve day-to-day function and stop persistent pain controlling your life.

1. Learn about your pain

The first and best thing you can do is learn more about why your body is producing pain sensations. This brochure includes many helpful websites and resources that can help you learn more about how pain works and strategies to manage it.

To learn more search for '[Understanding pain in less than 5 minutes](#)' or scan the QR code on your phone camera



'Understanding pain in less than 5 minutes'

2. Set goals to improve your day-to-day function

Think about realistic goals that you would like to achieve. For example, going for a daily walk, or doing the grocery shopping without help. Write down your goals and share them with your GP.

See '[My Health Plan](#)' for an example of how you can record and work toward your goals. >



'My Health Plan'



3. Make movement a part of your plan

Movement is very helpful for treating persistent pain. Your GP can refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist who can help you learn how to move safely. For exercise tips, see the [‘Pain network – pain and physical activity’ brochure](#)



‘Pain network – pain and physical activity’ brochure

4. Think about your pain medicines

Medicines can be effective in the short-term to help get you moving and support you while learning active pain management strategies but taking them long term for persistent pain can make you feel worse. We now understand that opioid medicines (e.g. tapentadol, codeine, oxycodone) can actually cause more pain, by making your nerves and brain more sensitive to pain. They can also cause unwanted side effects like drowsiness.

For some people, reducing the amount of pain medicines taken can be helpful. Your GP or pharmacist can answer any questions you have about your pain medicines.

To learn more search for [‘Understanding Pain: Brainman stops his opioids’](#) or scan the QR code on your phone camera



‘Understanding Pain: Brainman stops his opioids’

Always talk to your doctor before stopping, starting, or changing any of your medicines.

5. Have a team of health professionals to help you

A good place to start is by talking to your GP. They can help you find strategies that work for you to improve your day-to-day function. They can also refer you to a psychologist, physiotherapist, exercise physiologist or occupational therapist who specialises in treating persistent pain. A social worker can help you find community activities and support. Peer support groups can also help with this. For more information, visit [‘Chronic Pain Australia’](#)



‘Chronic Pain Australia’

Where can I find further information?

Search the below pages or scan the QR codes:



[ACI pain management network](#) – includes 7 episodes to help you learn more about pain and how to manage it



[Pain health](#) – PainHEALTH has information, tips, support, and personal stories to help with musculoskeletal pain



[Pain Australia](#) – information to help you find support including a pain care directory



[Chronic Pain Australia](#) – factsheets, videos and webinars, and moderated forums to help you connect and seek support



[Tame the Beast](#) – information and videos on how to re-train the pain system



[Mindspot pain course](#) – a free 8-week online pain course, including consultation and support from a psychologist



[The Pain toolkit](#) – a free retrain pain course that uses a science based approach to reducing symptoms



[Our Mob](#) – Resources for Aboriginal People including videos, stories and factsheets



[Pain Link Helpline 1300 340 357](#) – a helpline to assist with action planning, practical tips, and referral to appropriate services

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Supporting quality use
of medicines.