



Living Around Pain

Pain can take you to dark and lonely places where you never intended to go. This brief paper provides some suggestions about how not to spend too much time in those dreadful places.

Pain forces you to have two lives:

1. The 'pain-full' life when you may feel totally incapacitated by your pain.
2. The 'pain-less' life when you either pretend not to have pain or if you are lucky, have pain-free times.

Be a pain detective

Our body is an information system and pain is a signal that we need to heal and change something. Most signals fluctuate and have ebbs and flows. We need to start by learning this pattern. These are different for every person. Learning these patterns takes some sleuthing.

Create a pain journal. Rate your pain daily, usually out of ten. Try to identify things that made it worse and also things that improved it. Look for factors like diet, sleep the previous night, stresses, loneliness, amount of or type of physical activity and sense of involvement with people.

Develop a treatment team

Helpful professionals include GP's, Pain Specialists, Clinical Psychologists, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Acupuncturists and Nurses. The most important member of your treatment team is always going to be yourself. You need to become an expert in managing your pain well.

Decide who should know about your pain

Not everyone is equally capable of dealing with your pain. Some people are helpful. Some are not. Decide carefully who to share information with about your pain. Be selective. You have a right to your dignity and to your privacy. You need helpful support and not everyone is able to give you this.

You are more than this

Pain can be so domineering it can take over your identity. You can almost forget who you are when you don't have pain. Try to keep some cherished activities that remind you that there is more to you than the pain you are currently experiencing. This can involve setting small goals or milestones to look forward to or setting aside specific times of the week to do activities regardless of pain.

Develop a Pain Management Plan

Pain can rob you of parts of your life. Think about what pain has already taken from you. It could be happiness, a social life, a sense of being worthwhile or being strong or attractive. Work with a health professional to start to reclaim back your life. You may not be able to this all the time but you do need to plan to create a life around your pain.

The things we do to lessen pain can sometimes make it worse and kick off a pattern of, 'do less, move less, hurt less, sleep less, feel worse.' Planning will help you to not fall into this trap.

Have a plan for severely painful times. You may begin with medications but also consider hot or cold packs, baths, naps, self-hypnosis, stretching or biofeedback. Reducing stress by using an app like the (free) [mental stillness app](#).

Develop a plan to make pain less present in your life. Pain is a signal to change your lifestyle.

Pace yourself, but try to find activities that either decrease the frequency or intensity of pain episodes. The interventions that people find useful vary but include therapeutic massage, anti-inflammatory diets, counselling, tai chi, yoga, hypnosis, strength-building, mud and mineral baths, anti-depressants, support groups, stretching and gentle dancing. You need to find what works for you and do it.

One of the frustrations I have as a practitioner in this area, is patients often come to me and say, "I tried X (a particular intervention) and I felt better so I stopped X and now I feel worse." Your aim needs to be your optimal level of functioning rather than being free of the interventions that allow you to function optimally. It is time to reclaim as much wellness and fun as you can. You deserve to enjoy the best life you can.

Thank you to Andrew Fuller for the content within this factsheet. Andrew is a Clinical Psychologist and Family Therapist. Fellow in the Departments of Psychiatry, Learning and Educational Development at the University of Melbourne

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