

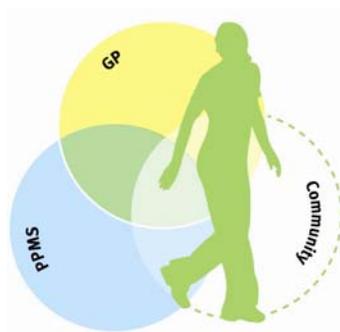
Persistent Pain Management Series

Your guide to managing flare-ups

What is a flare-up?

A flare-up is when your pain increases. This can be sudden and unexpected, or associated with doing an activity. It can be difficult to find the cause of a flare-up because there may be more than one thing causing it. There can also be a delay between the activity and the increase in pain.

It is important to understand what causes your flare-up so you can manage your pain more effectively. A flare-up might be caused by something medical (e.g. a new minor injury, medication cycle), physical (e.g. the weather), emotional (e.g. stress), or the result of mismanaged pacing (refer to the *Your guide to goal setting and pacing*, and *Your guide to exercising* fact sheets) where you have been engaged in an activity for too long.



Key message

It is important that you get to know what causes a flare-up so you can manage your pain more effectively.

How can I manage a flare-up?

The best way to manage flare-ups is to prevent them. This does not mean you should stop doing physical activity, it means learning how to recognise a flare-up and what may have led to it. The more in tune you are with things that make your pain worse the earlier you can detect a flare-up and the easier it will be to manage it.

It is also important to continue to take your prescribed medicines even if there are times when you feel it is not necessary. You should discuss the possibility of changing your medication use with your GP. Medications for pain are changing and your response to them changes, so keep up the communication.

Techniques to manage flare-ups

Relaxation

Relaxation techniques (refer to the *Your guide to distress and relaxation* fact sheet) can be used when experiencing a flare-up. Remember, there is a difference between rest and relaxation. Relaxation is an active process whereas resting for extended periods of time can mean your muscles become de-conditioned.

Change your thoughts and feelings

Stay positive and do not let the flare-up take over your mind with negative thoughts. It is easy to give into the pain and to think negative thoughts such as 'I won't get through this' or 'I can't deal with this'. This can easily contribute to making the pain experience worse.



**FLARE UPS - THEY DON'T LAST FOREVER
AND YOU WILL GET THROUGH THEM**

What's not so easy is to be positive, don't give in, don't let the pain take over, instead think (and believe), 'I will get through this' or 'this won't last forever'. Remember, this is another opportunity to learn more about your pain, not to get caught up in negative thoughts and allow the flare-up to run its course.

Exercise and pacing

Continue to use pacing when you do any activity (refer to the *Your guide to goal setting and pacing* fact sheet). This might mean changing your pacing goals while experiencing a flare-up (e.g. reduce your daily walk from 10 minutes to five minutes). Remember, if you can't do something that someone has asked you to do because your pain has flared up, you can say 'no' and you don't have to feel guilty about it.

Talk to your healthcare professional to determine the right level of activity that won't cause flare-ups.

Distract yourself

During a flare-up a useful technique that can help lower the pain is to distract your mind by focussing on something else.

Please write down some strategies and positive things to think of in the space below so you can refer back to them when experiencing a flare-up. This information will help you to complete your pain management plan.

Notes

Example: what are some strategies I can use and positive things to think of when I am experiencing a flare-up?