

Statewide Persistent Pain Management Network



Persistent Pain Education Series

Your Guide to Exercising

I have persistent pain, is it safe to move?

You have probably had all sorts of advice when it comes to exercising with persistent pain. From those who say 'no pain, no gain, just push through it', to those that say you should avoid any activities that make your pain worse.

It's okay to be confused.

It is safe to say however that we know that complete avoidance of movement will not help in the long run. **Motion is lotion.**

Specific movement/ is safe and effective for people with persistent pain, whether it's from Osteoarthritis, nerve pain or tendon pain. Other bonuses from a bit of daily movement are:

- ✓ Walking or movement on land will help your bones stay strong
- ✓ You'll stimulate release of hormones which turn the volume down on pain production
- ✓ You'll help to keep your heart and lungs in good condition
- ✓ You might find getting your heart rate up also helps to 'clear your head' and improve your concentration and overall mood and motivation
- ✓ You may find it helps you sleep better
- ✓ New neural (nerve) pathways will be created which will help to override some of the 'pain networks' that have dominated for so long (take that!)



THE HANSENS WERE REALISTIC AND DIDN'T SET THE BAR TOO HIGH

...Okay, I'll join a gym!

Hold your horses!

Step one is to have a good understanding of your pain and your body. Have confidence that your muscles, nerves and joints are ready to be exercised. Your original injury/onset of pain was a long time ago, long enough that everything is now healed but probably just a bit weak, so **go slow**. Also remember that your pain processing system has been very **well** exercised. It is good at producing pain even for no apparent reason.

You don't have to push yourself to your limits. Despite what you see on TV or read in Fitness magazines, you **can** get benefits from movement/exercise without having to gasp for breath.



Don't like gyms?

Exercise can simply be taking the dog for a walk, or going to the local shops. If you don't like doing the activity, you're unlikely to keep doing it. Some examples of types of exercise that are better tolerated by people with longstanding pain are Tai Chi, hydrotherapy and Yoga. What has worked for someone else may not necessarily work for you. Move with a mate! This will give you some extra motivation and someone to chat with.

Where do I start?

Talk to a health professional

But make sure they have a modern, science-based understanding of persistent pain, your pain and exercise.

Ask this professional the following questions

- Am I safe to move?
- What sort of limits should I set myself?
- What sort of movements should I focus on?
- Are there movements I should do less of?
- Does this exercise/therapy have some good scientific research supporting it?

Whilst you may progress to group based exercise, we suggest you start with 1 on 1 sessions so you can explore your boundaries and not be tempted to overdo it.

Help! I started exercising but it made my pain worse

Firstly, **don't freak out**. This does not mean that you have necessarily done any damage. Perhaps you stressed your tissues a bit beyond their limits, maybe you went back to an activity that you associate with being harmful to you, or maybe you are experiencing delayed onset muscle soreness (a very normal problem!).

The 'volume' has been turned up across your nervous and immune systems.

Even gentle movements are resulting in 'danger' messages being sent up to your brain. But there is always somewhere where you can start. If you haven't consulted a health professional who understands your pain, do this first. They will be able to find a good starting place and progress from there.

I get hardly any sleep because of pain, how can I exercise?

Poor sleep is a very common side effect of persistent pain. Persistent pain is usually the result of an over active nervous system and poor sleep heightens level of pain. Not a great combo! There are numerous ways to improve your sleep. One of them is to do some gentle exercise/movement during the day. Try to avoid high intensity activity 2-3 hours before you go to sleep as this can increase your heart rate and make it more difficult to get to sleep.

Additional Resources

Read <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/movement-with-pain/>

<https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/sleep-and-pain/>

Watch <https://www.paintoolkit.org/tools>

Listen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5O1jWIs1oAk>