

Knowing about managing your persistent pain

When we have an injury we feel pain as the body's way of protecting us from further harm to the injured tissues. In most cases pain can be treated simply, will go away quickly and won't return.

Sometimes pain lasts much longer and continues after an injury has healed. This is called persistent pain. It's harder to treat but it can be managed.

What is persistent pain?

Persistent pain is pain that remains even if the injury has healed. Some people are more likely to develop persistent pain.

Scientific studies have shown that the amount of pain people feel after injury doesn't always match the severity of injury they have had.

Pain that remains after the usual healing period for an injury isn't always related to ongoing tissue damage. Pain doesn't necessarily mean damage.

But persistent pain is real, it isn't "all in the mind" or "made-up", and to manage it you may need to use different types of treatments and activities.

How do I know if I have persistent pain?

Talk to your doctor if you notice that post-injury pain isn't going away.

Your doctor will check your overall health to make sure there's no other cause of the pain. Your doctor will also ask you about the pain and assess if you have:

- previous experience of severe pain
- too much pain for your injury
- a burning feeling or increased sensitivity
- a rash, swelling or redness of skin
- less ability to do the things you normally do
- fear or strong worry about your pain
- abnormal body temperature
- unusual or unexpected weight loss.

What treatment is available for persistent pain?

There are several ways to treat persistent pain, and it may take a while to get it under control. Most people benefit from regular physical activity and stress management. Some people may need to take medication regularly.

Physical activity

Regular daily activity can help lessen your pain. Your doctor may suggest activities such as short walks, housework, gardening, exercise and physiotherapy programmes. If you're physically active daily, it becomes part of your everyday routine and you feel better as a result.

One of the best ways to get active again, when you have ongoing pain, is to start with something simple that you can do regularly. Then you can gradually build up your activity little by little.



Stress management

Being stressed or anxious can make pain feel worse. Talk to your doctor about how you can relax. Ask about what support groups and programmes are available to help you deal with stress and anxiety.

If you have severe stress or anxiety your doctor may refer you to counselling or a psychologist to help you learn to manage your day-to-day routines to get your stress under control.

Medication

Medication may be used to treat persistent pain. Your doctor will talk to you about the best medication, and will generally begin with paracetamol. You may also be prescribed medicines to lessen inflammation and for nerve-related pain, if these are suitable for you.

If required, your doctor will talk to you about other medicines to help you manage stress and anxiety.

You might need to take several different types of medicines to control your persistent pain. This is to give you good pain relief so you can continue getting on with your life.

How long will it take to control my pain?

Everyone is different, but if your pain persists after two months of treatment more specialist help may be needed.

Sometimes persistent pain doesn't go away completely. But if you stay active, manage stress and take medication as prescribed by your doctor you can control it and do the everyday things you want to do.

Important facts about persistent pain

- Work with your doctor to find the best ways to treat and manage your pain – this is different for everyone.
- Persistent pain usually extends beyond six weeks, rarely “just goes away” and in some rare cases may always be present.
- You can manage your pain by understanding it, keeping active, staying positive and taking medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Questions to ask your doctor

- How can I help to lessen the pain?
- What can I do to stay positive?
- What unwanted effects might I expect from medication?
- Can I drive my car?
- What support is there for long-term pain?

Tips to help your recovery

- Discuss your pain and any changes with your doctor.
- Follow your doctor's advice and regularly take your medicines.
- Report any unwanted treatment effects if they happen.

Important: information in this leaflet is not intended to replace advice from a health professional.

Note: ACC only helps with treatment and rehabilitation when the pain is due to an injury.

It's good to stay active

