

THE SWEET ZONE :

A guide to moving
more for anyone
with persistent pain



This guide
is for:

...anyone who struggles
with persistent pain and
movement.

FLIPPIN' PAIN®

This guide was created for people in pain, with help from people in pain.

We will cover:

- Why moving more is so important
- How moving more is safe and won't cause more damage
- What to do to reduce the chance of flare-ups
- How to get started.

“We've created this document to help people get back to doing the things they love. Moving more for me was key. I recommend finding something you would enjoy doing every week, then simply adapt it to include a bit of movement each time. I found wildlife gardening the best therapy both physically and mentally. Just sitting out in the fresh air watching the bugs, birds and beasties enjoying their own space is such a lovely way to distract my mind from focusing on pain. Then when I feel able, I just do a little bit more gentle gardening each time, but I also make sure I get lots of rest too. Tea breaks are always built in!”
– Fen



Can moving more help with my pain?

We know that being active when you have persistent pain can be really tough: it can feel sore or stiff and easy to 'overdo it'. But moving more has been shown to help with pain levels, especially when it's done

gradually and **regularly.**

Moving more also improves our mood and circulation. It's good for our hearts, bones, muscles, mind, and overall health. It can extend our life expectancy. So, if you're:



Missing out on things you used to love doing

Having to rely on other people to do things for you



...let's think about how you can steadily and safely move more and get back to doing the things you love.

How do I know if I'm safe to move?

The latest pain science has told us that movement is the most important tool for recovery, and it is almost always safe to move.

Researchers have found that pain exists to protect us from harming ourselves. Persistent pain happens when our brain and nervous system get too overprotective: it keeps giving us pain even if we don't need it to keep us safe.

Too much rest and avoiding movement tends to make an overprotective pain system even more protective. The chance of ongoing pain (or even more pain) is higher if you stop moving, as your body adapts to being stationary.



If this is all new information, check out the Flippin' Pain Formula: a series of videos, podcasts and tasks that go through the science of pain. This will go into more detail about why it's safe to move.

Visit www.flippinpain.co.uk/formula

You can also get a health professional to check you over and give you the 'OK' to move. Unfortunately, some health professionals haven't heard of this new pain science: so it might be helpful to bring this guide along to support your appointment and explain what you'd like to achieve.



"A big thing for me was 'flipping' my idea of pain. Understand what's actually causing your pain, as often persistent pain doesn't mean 'stop'. If you know your pain, you know what you can do!" - Greg

Will I re-injure myself?

No one can completely remove all risk of injury: we can't control everything. But unless you're very unlucky, then your chances of injuring the painful body part through regular movement are very low. What will happen by moving more is that you'll become stronger, and your stronger body will be tougher to injure.

Remember: even if you do get an injury, your body is perfectly capable of healing and re-adapting again. Think of sportspeople who have multiple injuries and re-injuries, and yet in most cases keep going back to their sport.

As you begin to challenge yourself and move more, you might feel a bit more pain. But you can be confident that an increase in pain does not mean an increase in injury.

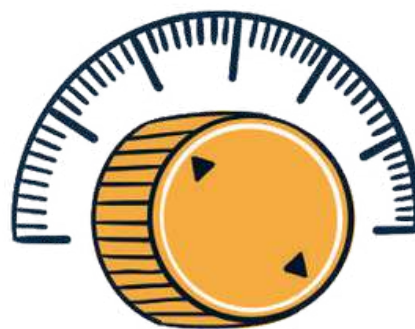
Remind yourself that pain is trying to protect you: it's not a sign of damage.

If a flare-up lasts longer than usual, or you have had a significant accident and you are concerned, ask your health professional to give you the 'all clear'.

How much pain is OK?

A good rule of thumb is the 'two-point guide': give your pain a rating before you start moving on a scale of 0-10. Then try to start with movements that don't cause pain to increase by more than two points on that scale.

Any increases in pain should go back down again within a day or so. If it takes longer, think about doing a bit less movement next time. If you recover very quickly, it's a good sign that you can do a bit more!



We call this: 'finding the sweet zone'. The sweet zone is when you do just enough to push yourself, but not to the point where it's too uncomfortable. It might take some patience and persistence, but finding the sweet zone is one of the best things you can do to recover.

Doing too much, regardless of how much it hurts, can often cause people to give up because the pain is so intense. This is called the 'boom-bust cycle'.





Doing too little and avoiding everything that hurts is sometimes called the 'avoidance pathway'. This can make things worse in the long run.

The sweet zone is somewhere in the middle. Rest is important in order to not overdo it and 'boom-bust'. But rest doesn't have to mean doing nothing: you could just take it easier in between days finding the sweet zone.



"Sometimes I have to pause and remind myself that I'm not the runner I used to be. I have to stop myself from looking back at what I can't do and start to learn about what I can do ... one day, I went swimming and did another few lengths because I felt good. I got out and I felt OK until I got home, when my bones felt achy. I'd paid for it, but it was a good pay! I'd enjoyed the extra lengths, and it just meant that I needed a bit of extra time to recover." – Sharon



How do I get started?

It's a good idea to list all of the things that you enjoy that you're currently not able to do. Then, you can set some goals on how to gradually get back to doing them.



It could be that you have one larger goal that you break down into smaller goals each week, or a number of small goals that you meet one at a time.

What you'd like to achieve and how you set your goals out will be unique to you: it could be starting a new type of activity, taking one extra step on a walk each day, adding stretches to your morning routine, or practicing sitting in a chair. It all counts, and there's no such thing as too small or too big of a step – as long you keep to the sweet zone.

Here are some examples...

If you struggle to get to the shops, your goals could include:

Doing some exercises to help you get from a chair to a standing position more comfortably



Getting used to walking and slowly increasing the distance of each walk



Building strength in your upper arms to help with carrying bags.



If you struggle to get from a lying to a sitting position, your goals could include:

Exploring the 'log roll' technique: search 'Covid Physical Therapy Log Roll' on YouTube



Practicing sitting in a chair and pushing through your arms to raise your bottom up and down off the seat. This can build arm strength which could make going from lying to sitting easier.



If you want to attend a wedding in a year's time (and be able to stand in photos and dance), your goals could include:

Practicing moving from sitting in a chair to standing. This can build leg strength



Increasing your walking tolerance, maybe using walking poles or other mobility aids to help do this



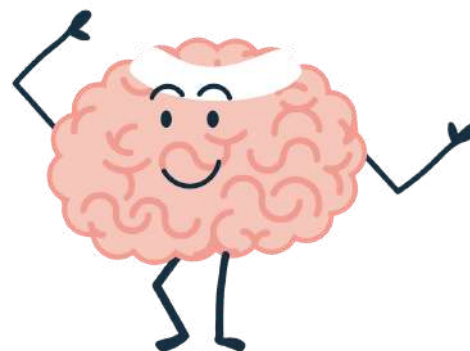
Trying something gentle, like Tai Chi, to help improve your balance and confidence in movement.



Even just doing 1% more than you did the day before can make a huge difference. It might not seem much at the time, but it all adds up over the long-term.

Cushions, sticks and handrails might seem like ways to be less active: but actually, many people use them as a way to feel more confident when finding the sweet zone.

For more information, check out these websites:



www.curablehealth.com/podcast/your-pain

www.tamethebeast.org

www.livewellwithpain.co.uk

www.weareundefeatable.co.uk

Search: 'Tom Jesson: Exercising When It Hurts'

Search: 'Let's Move with Leon' YouTube

everybodymoves.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio

Search for 'Just One Thing - Think Yourself Stronger' on BBC Sounds

rethinkingpain.org/movement-matters

www.paintoolkit.org

How do I manage flare-ups?

A flare-up is a sudden but temporary increase in your symptoms. This could be more intense pain, tiredness, stiffness, or other symptoms of illness. When flare-ups happen and how long they last can be hard to predict. But don't panic! Pain is not always logical, and flare-ups are not unusual.

It's very unlikely that a flare-up is a sign that you've damaged yourself: in most cases it's just your overprotective pain system raising the alarm. But if what you're experiencing feels very new, and/or the flare-up lasts for much longer than you're used to, you might wish to speak to a health professional.

It's okay to do a bit less when you are having a flare-up, but don't stop moving! You can easily change the amount you do to suit you: this could be reducing your steps, less repetitions of exercises or taking longer rests between movements. Just take it steady until your flare-up passes, and you can then revisit your goals: do you need to take them a bit steadier to stay in the sweet zone?



"In my experience, I have to cut my movement back when I have a flare-up. I have to cut down to 10-20% of what I can do to make my brain feel safe enough to lower the pain levels: but everyone is different, and it's still important to keep moving."

- Sashira

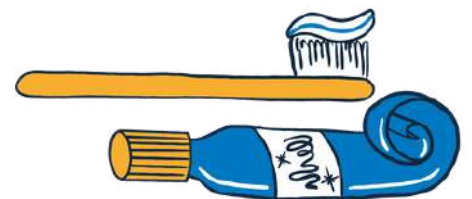


What's the best exercise for people with persistent pain?

The best exercise is the one that you enjoy: and it doesn't have to be what we normally think of as 'exercise'! Things like dancing, gardening, going out with friends, and some forms of volunteering all involve moving more. Whatever you do, you are more likely to stick with it if you enjoy it: and this fun stuff still counts!

Going to the gym every day, or doing long, intense work outs aren't needed: a lot of these small steps can be done at home, using gentle movements, with no equipment. Being outdoors, especially in nature, can be a challenge for some of us (especially in winter), but can be really beneficial.

Some movements could be built into your everyday routines: for example, doing a few mini squats or heel raises when you brush your teeth. As long as it's in the sweet zone, it counts.



"I think it's about finding something that helps you enjoy moving and helps you fall in love with your body. For me that was adult ballet, which was very different to the things I had once done. It helped that it was a class, but also that I was able to not care I was bad at it. It was different, engaging, social and outside of my comfort zone... but not by too much!" - Niki



I already do lots of exercise, but still experience pain...

Some people with persistent pain already do a massive amount of exercise (some are Olympians!): if this is you, it can be a case of linking exercise with other factors that might be affecting your pain.

There are a lot of other factors to explore, things like:

Improving your sleep Making healthy changes to your diet. Taking care of your stress, worries and mental health. Making adjustments to social and work situations.

You can learn more about how all of these things play a part by using the Flippin' Pain Formula.

www.flippinpain.co.uk/formula



There are also a number of different things to try whilst you're moving more. We recommend looking up somatic tracking, pain reprocessing therapy and graded motor imagery: all of these things have been suggested by people who have found them helpful in the past.

"I have persistent pain in my tailbone, and I've been working on teaching my brain that it's safe to sit in all the different positions/seats that I have been avoiding for the past couple of years. As well as working on sitting on the sofa and sitting up straight (instead of leaning forwards), I'm working on being able to go down the slide with my little boy: I want to be able to join in the fun when we go to the park! I'm taking it in stages: at the moment I'm working on being able to sit on the floor with my legs straight out in front of me. I'm using somatic tracking to

teach my brain that these things are safe to do. And I know somatic tracking works, because I've used it to be able to lay on my back, roll over, run and jump, so I know I'll get there!" - Vicky



For more information about the (often surprising) science of pain, visit:

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