

Summary

Research emphasizes the more you understand how your nervous system works the better you can reduce your pain.

Persistent Pain

- Pain that has lasted longer than 3 months.
- Often occurs after an acute injury although an injury is not necessary to have persistent pain.
- Results from pathological and maladaptive changes in the nervous system, which leads to a nervous system 'wind-up' and it becoming hypersensitive.
- The pain alarm system becomes more ready to fire.
- Less stimulation is required to send danger messages and the brain becomes more efficient at creating and projecting pain to areas of the body.
- Persistent pain does not mean that the body's tissues have not healed. Pain does not equal harm. Pain is an output from the brain to protect tissues that are perceived to be under threat.

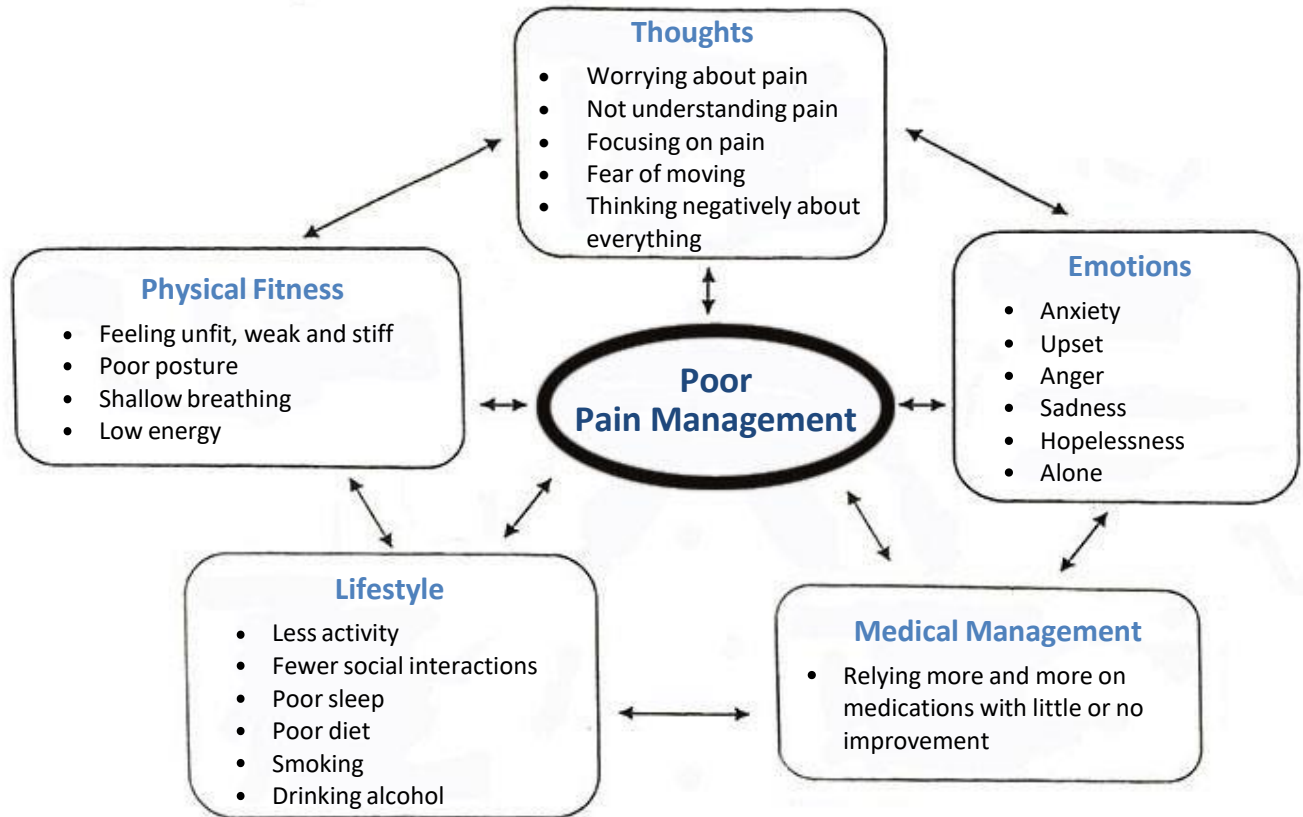
Wound-up Nervous System

- A persistent pain nervous system is on high alert
- Hypersensitive to even the slightest disturbances:
 - Loud noises, bright lights, scents
 - Gentle stretch
 - Light touch
 - Restricted breathing

Effects of a Wound-Up Nervous System

- Breath holding and shallow breathing
- Rapid heart rate
- Muscle tension
- Sweating
- Digestive issues
- Irritable, less patient, frustrated
- Feeling sad or depressed
- More fear and anxiety
- Less movement/activity
- Wanting to isolate or withdraw
- Increased pain
- Disturbed sleep
- Less energy
- Decreased concentration and memory
- Sick more often

Pain Cycle

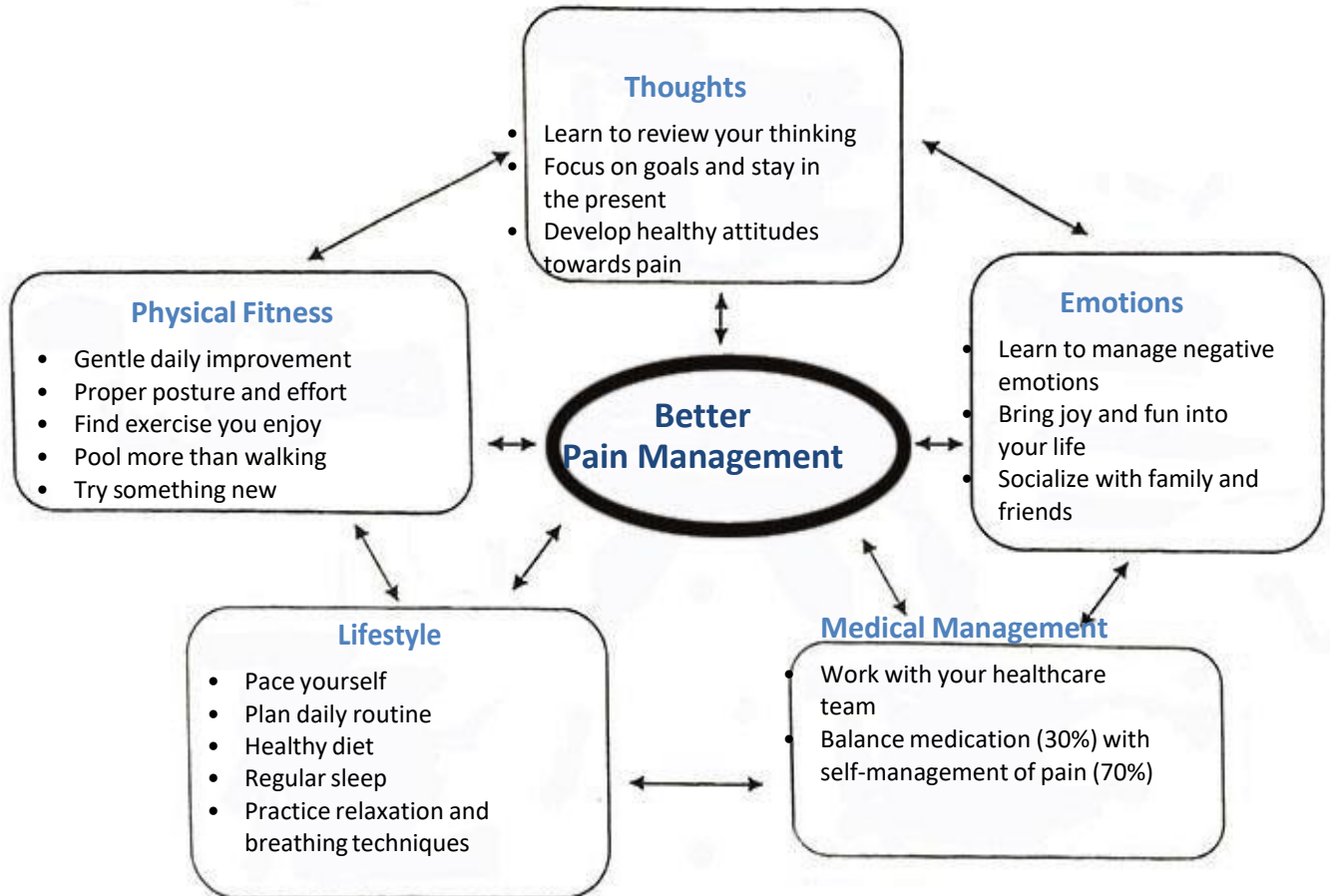


Breaking the Pain Cycle

- There is no quick fix. It will take broad lifestyle changes and re-examining your habits and support systems to calm your nervous system.
- You need to actively self-manage your pain cycle by developing physical, mental and emotional strategies that will “wind down” your nervous system first and then build strength and resiliency. You can change pain!

Pain Reduction

Must involve ALL of the following dimensions:



Frequently Asked Questions

Should I push through my pain?

- Generally, no, you should not push through your pain.
- Instead, take a brief break and focus on breathing or relaxation activities.
- Pace yourself—change activities.

Should I give up daily living activities like shopping and housework?

- No, you should not give up your daily living activities.
- Instead, try to find new ways to accomplish the same tasks.
- Try new body postures or reorganize your environment.
- Keep healthy, engaged routines in your day. Honor your commitments.

How should I start exercising?

- Start gently. Use 70% of your capability.
- Progress or build up slowly.
- Exercise more frequently for shorter periods of time.

Why does my head feel so foggy? I can't remember anything!

- Pain can be distracting—this makes it hard to focus on tasks.
- Other factors can also affect your brain function:
 - Inadequate sleep
 - Feeling blue or depressed
 - Long term stress
 - Some medications
- Try the following:
 - Relaxation exercises
 - Calm breathing
 - Moderate exercise
 - A good sleep
 - A change of pace or environment

Why does my pain change from day to day?

- Many factors influence your pain. Some of them could be your mood, sleep, your environment, or your stress levels.

Why am I so irritable and depressed?

- It is common to experience irritability, depression, sadness, and grief with pain.
- Persistent pain is physically unpleasant.
- Persistent pain may result in you not being able to do the things you want from day to day and affect your lifestyle in ways you have not anticipated.

Frequently Asked Questions cont...

Why can't I sleep?

- You may not be able to get comfortable.
- You may also find you cannot “switch off” your mind at night due to stress or worry.
- Try increasing your physical activity. Get outside during the day.
- Napping too long too late in the day.
- Write down your worries with an action plan to get them off your mind.

Moving Forward

The impact of pain on your life can be reduced with some key tools of self-management:

- Know that your hurts will not harm you.
- Pain does not equal tissue damage.
- Pain is an alarm to assess perceived threats to the body.
- Acceptance of pain as it is will help.
- Commitment to change will help.
- Practice, practice and more practice to train a calm nervous system including several techniques:
 - Pace your activities.
 - Retrain your breathing.
 - Reengage in movement. **Motion is lotion.**
 - Practice relaxation.
 - Gain awareness of how your thoughts influence your pain.
 - Understand the impact that pain has on relationships and learn effective communication.
 - Develop an ongoing daily plan to manage pain and flare-ups.
 - Maximize nutrition and hydration to optimize your health.
- Assess your nervous system by being aware of your:
 - Breathing
 - Posture and movement
 - Energy and mood
- Be kind, patient, and gentle with yourself; start low and go slow

