

Create a Pain Plan

Personal Pain Management Plan

Effective management of chronic pain does not necessarily mean it will be eased completely, rather that it can be reduced to a tolerable level. When an individual takes responsibility for managing their pain, the chance of a normal life opens up to them again. Rather than looking at the negative aspects of the pain, focusing on the positive qualities and abilities they have starts to break the control that the pain has over them. Pain management is a daily step by step learning process which may not always go smoothly, but with perseverance, courage and accepting help and advice from people in your support network, life can start to become far more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Pain management relies on regular assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of various treatments, therapies and coping techniques in helping a person deal with pain. Designing a personal pain management plan will help in two ways. Firstly, it helps to identify what makes the pain worse, whether there are any things that make it better, when the pain is at it's worst and best. Secondly, if you know what things trigger the pain and what helps you to cope with the pain, you can create a strategy for coping with "flare ups" or bad days.

Steps to Creating your Pain Management Plan

1. Discuss your condition with your doctor. Ensure you get clear answers to all the questions you have and that you tell them about your concerns. Do not assume that they know how you are feeling or what affect your condition is having on you. You are entitled to expect your doctor to take the time to explain your condition to you and give you the information you need in a way that you understand. Do not be afraid to speak up and question anything you do not agree with - only you know how things really feel. Check out other reliable sources of information i.e. internet, books, pharmacist, other health professionals, support organisations.

2. Keep a Pain Diary. Write down as much information as possible about your pain:
when does the pain begin? (day, date, time),
where is the pain? what sort of pain is it?
how long does it last, how strong is it?
what were you doing?
what situations/activities make the pain worse/better?
what emotions are you feeling? what thought do you have?
what medicines do you take? what medicines work?
3. Identify what support is available for when you need it. Do you have family or close friends who can provide help and support to you during flare-ups, or when the pain is worse? Do you have quick access to health professionals when the pain is worse? Is there a support group or fellow sufferer which you can contact? What community resources are available to you?
4. Create your Personal Pain Management Plan. Using the information that you gather in your pain diary, create a plan that you can use to control your pain on a daily basis. Identify what things tend to help to reduce the pain or if there is something that helps you to cope better when the pain is worse. The plan needs to be realistic and what is most effective for you - not what is easiest or most convenient for the people around you, who make up your support network.

take account of activities that distract you i.e. hobbies; relaxation techniques.

draw up a medication schedule to show what you take, when you take it, how often you can take it, what side effects, if any, may happen.

developing a step-by-step checklist for coping with pain flare-ups can be invaluable when you are tired, emotional and cannot think

clearly because the pain is starting to take control. It will give you a reference guide of the things that help to make you cope better and put you back in control. Always have a copy of your plan close at hand which you can refer to it should the need arise. The plan should be reviewed at regular intervals with you support team i.e. doctor, nurse, therapist, key family members.

5. Discover coping skills that help you to manage your pain. Effective pain relief is more likely to occur if you take small steps rather than rush things

Set priorities to achieve the most important things first and pace your activity levels so you do not become over-tired.

Avoid isolating yourself by keeping communication links open with your support network i.e family, friends, doctors.

Learn relaxation and stress reducing techniques i.e meditation, visualisation, self-hypnosis.

Other important tips

Maintain a regular sleep routine. Even if you have difficulties sleeping it is important to stick to a normal routine.

Get some gentle exercise. Inactivity leads to weakness, sleeplessness, listlessness. Your doctor or therapist will be able to give you advice on suitable exercises which will not be harmful. Do not avoid exercise just because you experience some pain and discomfort, over time the benefits are likely to outweigh the initial tenderness you experience when first starting out.

Eat a healthy diet. It is important to drink plenty of water and eat a balanced diet.

Recognise you emotions. Pain will often make you tired, frustrated, anxious, angry or depressed and this can make the pain seem worse and lower you ability to cope with it.

Identify negative thought patterns.

Be aware of how you react to other people or situations, noting when you feel irritable or unable to cope with minor things that occur.

Many people find it useful to seek help from a counsellor, psychologist or hypnotherapist in order to discover how to deal with their emotions in relation to their pain.

Be kind to yourself. Living with pain is not easy and you can be your own worst enemy by being stubborn and not accepting your limitations. Give yourself credit for each positive step you take.

i.e. get up at a regular time in the morning;

do not nap during the day, you may feel you need to rest for a short period but do not sleep.

get plenty of fresh air and sunlight,

do not become reliant on medication to help you sleep.

take a hot bath or have a warm, milky drink before going to bed.