

B3: Increase confidence in movement

The role of 'exercise' in pain management

When we experience pain it often stops us from doing the activities we might enjoy and we might move differently, sit differently and stand differently in an effort to be more comfortable.

Often this leads to what we call deconditioning, where movement is decreased, joints are stiff, muscles aren't as strong as they once were and sensations are altered.

Often our balance and co-ordination are affected and our awareness of our body changes (we can become less aware or more aware).

When we start to think about exercise for persistent pain, what we are really thinking about is "movement" – starting to get the body moving again, improving body awareness and re-establishing a sense of confidence.

Many people find that they become fearful of movement (and increasing pain) and that this then increases avoidance of movement and expectation of pain.

Starting to move well again is very important in order to normalise input from the periphery and output from the central nervous system and reduce the pain experience.

All the "exercises" in this section are designed to allow you to start experiencing movement again safely, to stretch things that are tight, and to recognise your body position. Often we will 'cheat' when we move (particularly if muscles are tight or weak), you may not even realise, and 'exercises' will help you to move again in the way we were designed to move.

These are not prescriptive; you need to do them in a way that suits you, starting slowly and building gently.

They may act as a "launch pad" to re-establishing other exercise options and activities.

With all exercise focus should be on quality (not quantity – better a few exercises done well), and awareness of movement (re-establishing a connection with the body).

Recognise that others around you may move differently and do not compare yourself to them or try to keep up. Everyone's start point will be different.

For some people, just visualising (imagining) movement will be where they need to start.

Why movement matters...and why it matters how we move.

Approaches to exercise and movement.

"Much more of the brain is devoted to movement than to language. Language is only a little thing sitting on top of this huge ocean of movement." Oliver Sacks, neurobiologist and author.

Considering the above quote our brain is hugely important when it comes to movement; however often when we are moving, our minds are elsewhere, maybe thinking about tasks to be done, or thinking about how we feel about exercising whether we like it or not, or worse still worrying about how we will feel after we have finished exercising!

While our brain is busying itself with these thoughts, our body is left unattended, its efforts can go unnoticed, under-appreciated, and the potential effectiveness of the movements and exercises we are engaged in is reduced.



How I can ensure my brain is more directly involved with my body when exercising/ moving:

“To feel better in your body you first need to feel your body better” Diane Jacobs, Canadian physio

If you imagine what it was like learning any new skill such as driving a car, or using new technology such as computer the first thing you would usually do is have a good look over the task in hand, handle the objects with which you will be performing the task, and reduce all other demands and disturbances so that you could give your entire focus to learning this new skill. Imagine how your performance might be hampered by; wearing a blindfold, being in a noisy environment, or wearing boxing gloves so you couldn't feel the objects you were dealing with.

Trying to exercise and move when you are in pain, and have become switched off from listening to your body can be like the example above. Re-acquainting yourself with all of the physical sensations of your body can be an important first step in knowing your 'tool' and knowing how to use it successfully.

How can I connect more with the physical sensations in my body?

“Usually I can't walk more than a few yards, when I was on holiday though I managed to walk round the entire lake with no pain!” Previous patient.

You may have noticed how the same movement can feel different when carried out in a different context such as when you are on holiday, or when you are particularly relaxed compared to when you may be more stressed.

We may not realise it but part of the complexity of pain is that it can become a habitual response. If pain becomes a regular response to performing a movement such as bending to put on our shoes, we can start to fear the act of putting on our shoes; the body's response to fear is to tense up which can then create even more pain and we can be in a never ending vicious cycle.

How can I break the habit of anticipating pain when I move?

Good to have internal attentional focus sensation

Accept sensations which are a habitual response to movement.

Focus on pain and accept it is being generated from within ask the question is there anything I am doing which is adding to this sensation – am I holding myself, am I worried about something, am I anxious about the movement



Goldilocks approach - not too much, not too little, but somewhere in the middle is usually just right.

- Experiment or play with different ways to move. Confront your fears.
- Apply a Goldilocks level of exercise stress to the painful area to encourage adaptation without further injury.

Strategies to start us, and keep us moving.

Planning how to use exercise and movement is a vital step once we have decided that exercise and movement should be part of our pain management plan. This process is something we may return to again and again if we encounter issues with maintaining our movement and exercise regimes.

I'd like to start exercising, but...

Sometimes we have every intention to move more and use exercise, and even have a plan as to which exercises we will do; but something holds us back from starting. At these times there are some questions we can ask ourselves which may help...

How important is it to me that I start this exercise?

0-----10

put an X on the line

How confident am I to start this exercise?

0-----10

put an X on the line

When you answer these 2 simple questions the answers can give you an honest insight into your true motivation (importance question) , and any fears (confidence question) relating to your planned exercise.

Recognizing when your motivation is low can prompt you to review your situation and perhaps come up with something you would be more motivated to do.

Recognizing when your confidence low, or possibly fear is high, can prompt you to tackle something less frightening where you feel more confident of success.

If you find you lack confidence in doing the very things you feel your body needs, you may want to look in more detail at what is behind your concerns. By discovering what is behind your concerns you have the opportunity to seek help or advice to address them, or adapt your plans to overcome the factors that cause the worry.