Dorset Pain Management Service
Soaring above pain

NHS
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Dorset Pain Management Service

Support Booklet



QR code links to the Dorset Pain Management Service website

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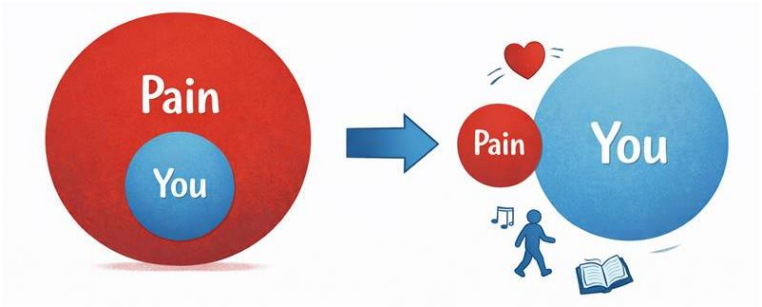
This booklet provides practical guidance, tools, and strategies to help you manage your pain day-to-day. It is designed for people who may be waiting for an appointment or unable to attend regular sessions. Everything here is evidence-based, easy to follow, and safe to use alongside your existing care.

Understanding pain and you

Pain can feel overwhelming, as if it takes up most of your life. Over time, learning ways to manage it can help you reclaim more of yourself.

The image below shows this idea: on the left, pain dominates, leaving little space for you. On the right, pain is still present, but more of you is available to do the things you enjoy, like walking, reading, or listening to music.



Persistent pain may occur when the nervous system including the brain and spinal cord becomes highly sensitive and remains 'switched on':

- after the original injury has healed
- or when there are persistent messages from grumpy structures (as is the case with osteoarthritis)
- or even in the absence of an injury

The nervous system becomes oversensitive, and danger messages are amplified. Like the volume on the radio being turned up too high even after the song has finished playing.

Messages that would normally be harmless (like gentle touch or easy movement) are interpreted by the brain as danger, which triggers the pain alarm.

It is a real and complex health condition: it is definitely not imagined or "in your head" but it could be in your brain.

Getting started: what you *can* control

While pain may not always go away quickly, there are many things you can influence and improve:

- Your activity levels and your routines, the way you manage stress
- Developing better, regular sleep habits
- Your approach to pacing and flare-up management
- The goals you set for yourself
- Pacing: balancing activity, rest, and using different muscle groups

Small, steady changes often bring the biggest improvements!

Pacing tips

Many people with persistent pain fall into a 'boom-and-bust' cycle: doing too much on good days, then needing long recovery periods.

Break tasks into smaller chunks

Include short rest breaks long before pain levels rise too high

Spread out activities through the day … little and often will get the job done!

Use timers or reminders if you tend to keep going until pain flares … the brain has to be retrained

Keep experimenting to get the 'dose' of activity right – you might not get it right the first time!

You might find it helpful to fill in the worksheet on the next page:

Pacing Worksheet	
One activity I tend to overdo	
How could I break it into smaller steps	
What would be my time or distance limit	
When would I put in planned rest breaks (how often)	
How much better will I feel as a result.	

Movement and gentle exercise

Movement helps calm the nervous system and improve confidence. Start low and slow.

Safe movement ideas:

- Short walks (remember to plan in the time it takes to get back!)
- Seated or standing stretches
- Light strengthening exercises
- Tai chi or yoga

Tips:

- Start with a level that feels manageable
- Increase one variable at a time (time, speed, weight)
- Expect natural fluctuations - progress is rarely straight upward

Sleep and stress management

Pain and sleep affect each other. When we're in pain, it's sometimes hard to sleep and when we don't sleep well, pain feels harder to manage.

Small habits can make a big difference. Here are some tips to sleep better:

- Maintain a regular bedtime routine to train the mind and body
- Reduce screen time before bed
- Create a calming wind-down routine
- Avoid long daytime naps
- Avoid stimulant drinks (caffeine) and food (sweets)

Useful Tools & Worksheets:

Sleep Journal - use this daily to track your sleep and identify patterns

Sleep Journal	
Date:	
Bedtime (HH:MM)	
Time you think you fell asleep	
Number of times you woke up	
Time you woke up	
Time you got out of bed	
Estimated total time asleep	
Sleep quality (circle one)	Very Poor | Poor | Fair | Good | Very Good
Factors that may have affected sleep	(e.g., caffeine, pain, stress, screen time, naps, medication).

Doing relaxation or meditation may help you sleep better. Here is one example of a relaxation exercise:

Relaxation Script (Short Version)

Sit or lie comfortably

Inhale slowly for 4 seconds

Exhale slowly for 6 seconds

Repeat for 2–5 minutes

Mood, thoughts and pain

Pain is affected by emotions and thoughts. This does **not** mean it's imaginary - it's how the pain system works.

Helpful Thinking Strategies:

- Notice unhelpful thoughts ('I can't do anything anymore')
- Replace them with balanced alternatives ('I can do things differently and gradually build up')
- Focus on achievements, not setbacks

Goal setting

Setting realistic goals helps you stay motivated and track progress.

SMART Goal Template:

Specific	What exactly do you want to do?
Measurable	How will you know you've done it?
Achievable	Is this realistic right now?
Relevant	Why does this matter to you?
Time-bound	When do you want to achieve it?

Example: 'Walk for 5 minutes every morning, 5 days per week, for the next 2 weeks'.

Managing flare-ups

Flares are common and do not mean you've harmed yourself. When pain increases, you might want to:

- Lower your activity levels temporarily
- Use relaxation or breathing techniques
- Review stress triggers
- Return to your usual routine gradually
- Remind yourself that you've survived flare ups before … you know how to.

What not to do

- Stop all activity: it's important to keep moving … gently, sensibly
- Believe your panic or fear-based thoughts ("I've damaged something")
- Think this will go on forever
- Making big, sudden changes to medication without medical advice

Recovery and setbacks

Recovery from persistent pain rarely leads to pain disappearing completely. Instead, it usually means that:

- Pain interferes less with your day-to-day activities, you feel more confident to take back control of your life
- You can do far more of what matters to you

Recovery often looks like an upward trend with natural ups and downs. Flare-ups and slower periods are a normal part of the process - there is no such thing as failure.

What matters is the overall direction over time, not what happens on one bad day or week.

Managing expectations

Progress Is Not a Straight Line … good days and bad days are normal steps along the way.

Improvements are usually gradual, and setbacks are part of adapting and can offer a lot of useful learning

It is really important to focus on the progress you are making and, on your functioning, not just on your pain levels.

Small consistent steps lead to meaningful change

Remember: Recovery is about building a life again, not waiting for pain to disappear.

Final message

Pain management is not about "pushing through" or "giving in." It's about learning new ways to support your body, calm the nervous system, and live well alongside pain.

Small, consistent steps can make meaningful changes.

You are not alone - support is available, even while you wait to be seen. Many people have benefited from this approach with their pain.

Red flags - when to seek medical help

Please keep your GP as your first contact for advice and support. Contact your GP or urgent care immediately if you experience:

- New bladder or bowel problems
- New weakness in your limbs
- Pain after significant trauma
- Unexplained weight loss or fever
- Rapidly worsening neurological symptoms
- New un-related pain or change in pain pattern.

Online/App learning resources

You may find these free online resources helpful alongside this booklet:

Understanding Pain in 5 Minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_3phB93rvI - short, animated video explaining how persistent pain works.

Why Things Hurt?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwd-wLdIHjs - a beginner-friendly guide to how pain is processed by the nervous system.

Retrain Pain
https://www.retrainpain.org/ - a website with videos, exercises, and simple explanations to help calm and retrain the pain system.

Flippin pain
https://www.flippinpain.co.uk/ a series of free podcasts, animations and worksheets that will help you to explore the world of pain science: at your own pace, in your own way.

Dorset Pain Management Service

https://dorsetpain.org.uk/ – our website has a variety of resources which can support you in managing your pain, including details of regular coffee morning support groups which are attended by our own team of experienced volunteers.

Happify

Has effective tools and programs to help you take control of your emotional wellbeing. Can be downloaded on Apple and Android Devices.

Headspace

The mental health app is here to help you manage your stress through personalised recommendations, guided meditations, and exercises which can be downloaded on Apple iTunes App Store or Google Play Store.

Calm

Calm offers both guided and unguided meditations, with sessions anywhere from 3–30 minutes long. Calm can be downloaded on Apple and Android Devices. Web: www.calm.com/app.

Mypossibleself

My Possible Self is a mental health app using clinically certified content from Priory Healthcare to help reduce anxiety, stress and low mood. Can be downloaded on all iOS and Android devices.

Crisis support services

Connections

Our all ages 24-hour mental health support line on free phone 0800 652 0190 or 111.

The Retreat

In Dorchester and Bournemouth, for anyone aged 18 and above offer a safe place if you feel you are approaching a crisis point. Open daily between 4.30pm and 11.30pm.

- Bournemouth**:** Hahnemann House, Hahnemann Road, BH2 5JW.
- Weymouth/Dorchester**:** 2 Ranelagh Road, Weymouth, DT4 7JD (Inside The Lantern Trust, moved from Dorchester in March 2026).

Community Front Room

In Bridport, Shaftesbury, Poole (Pop-up) and Weymouth, for anyone aged 18 and above also offer a safe place if you feel you are approaching a crisis point. Usually, open Thursday to Sunday between 2.15pm and 9.45pm.

- Bridport: The Harmony Centre, Unit 1 & 2, The Tower, St Michaels Trading Estate, DT6 3RR.
- Shaftesbury: Hope Offices, Longmead Industrial Estate, SP7 8PL.
- Weymouth: 56 St Mary's Street, DT4 8PA (Note: Open 15:15 - 22:45, per).
- Pop-up (Poole): AIMCreekmoor, Creekmoor Youth Centre, Northmead Drive, BH17 7XZ (Fridays 2-10pm).

Samaritans

24/7, 365-day-a-year charity providing confidential, non-judgmental emotional support to anyone in distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide. Free phone 116123.

Text SHOUT to 85258

A free, confidential, 24/7 UK text messaging support service for anyone struggling to cope, feeling overwhelmed, or in crisis. By texting "SHOUT" to 85258, you connect with a trained volunteer for anonymous, non-judgmental support to help you reach a calm and safe place.

distrACT

A trusted, free self-care support app shared by organisations across health, education, local government, charity, and industry. It gives people who self-harm or feel suicidal clear, evidence-informed guidance tailored to their needs - helping them practise safer self-care, find help earlier, and feel less alone.

GP

Ask for an emergency or urgent GP appointment, which many practices offer as same day, often with the first available doctor. If the crisis is in the evening/weekend, call NHS 111 and select the mental health option.

For more details about Dorset HealthCare direct access services and to check accessibility please visit our Access Mental Health pages