

Flare-up box

Some people find it useful to keep a flare-up box – a physical box with items inside which will help you to manage this flare-up. It might include reminders to yourself that you can get through this and have done so before. It might include a hot water bottle, an exercise sheet with some gentle stretches, photos and cards from loved ones, or some distraction activities like a good book or DVD.

Following on from a flare-up

When the flare-up reduces, it can help to review the plan and make changes that could help with future flare-ups.

- Reflect on what went well.
- What have you learned from the experience that you might want to adjust in your plan.
- Remember to pace back to activity gradually.
- Be kind to yourself.

More in-depth patient information is available

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/chronic-pain/living-with-chronic-pain/>

If you have any queries, please contact:

The Pain Clinic

Zone F, Department F18
RNHRD and Brownsword Therapies
Centre - Royal United Hospitals Bath
Pain Clinic Telephone: 01225 824331

If you need advice during out-of-hours, please contact your GP or NHS111. For emergency, please dial 999.

The RUH, where you matter

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If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656 or email ruh-tr.psct@nhs.net.

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Managing flare-ups of chronic pain

Patient Information Leaflet



What is a 'flare-up'?

A flare-up of chronic pain is a period where the pain increases and can become more difficult to cope with. Flare-ups may last hours, days or weeks and often there is no set pattern to them. During a flare-up, it might feel like the pain is overwhelming.

Flare-ups are a normal part of chronic pain. They're not necessarily a sign that things are getting worse.

What causes a flare up of chronic pain?

It is important to realise that often there is no trigger, and a flare-up can occur without reason. Sometimes it may have occurred because a person has pushed themselves too hard or fast. Other contributing factors can include:

- Under activity
- Over activity/new activity
- Reduced or imbalanced fitness
- Ill health
- Stress

How to manage a flare-up of chronic pain

You need to be kind to yourself during a flare-up. Caring for yourself and slowing down a little will help you get past the flare-up quicker.

- DO NOT panic – challenge negative thinking, so that you are able to think clearly – the pain will reduce in time.
- Maintain gentle activities.
- Avoid bed rest (no more than 24hrs).
- Take regular pain medication as prescribed.
- Use heat/ice.
- Use a Transcutaneous Electrical Stimulation device (TENS) if recommended.
- Continue with daily activities but break up with frequent short rests.
- Practise relaxation to de-stress and reduce tension.
- Use distraction techniques.
- Use mindfulness skills to develop awareness of the present moment and make more self-compassionate choices.
- Control your breathing or do some breathing exercises.
- Communicate with family or friends— you do not have to feel alone.

Be prepared for a flare-up of chronic pain

- Increase relaxation and mindfulness activities
- Pacing encourages you to choose when to take a break from an activity before pain or other symptoms become too much. Pacing your activities during a flare-up helps prevent overactivity or underactivity. Continuing to use your pacing strategies can help to prevent future flare-ups.
- Cut back on physical activities but do not stop altogether – some activity is better than no activity
- Acknowledge that although you may feel bad just now, the pain will pass.
- Do what you can to soothe the pain like taking a warm bath or using a heat pad.

Making a flare-up plan

The first thing to try is writing down what you would have in your plan – a 'first draft' that you can amend or add to from experience next time you have a flare-up. Consider sharing this plan with others and letting them know how they can help you or comfort you during a flare-up.

