

## What is self-management and why do it?

**Self-management includes looking at you as a whole person, not just one painful part of your body.** Your lifestyle, physical and mental health can all have an impact on your pain, so we need to look at all these areas to help you get the best result for your problem. Research has shown that people who are actively involved in their own care will have **better outcomes**.



We recommend you work with the advice given in this document while you wait for your appointment to give your body the best chance to improve.



The amount of information may seem overwhelming at first, so please do not try to make too many changes at once! **Try picking out one or two key areas you feel are most important to focus on.** When you are comfortable with these, try adding other areas into your self-management programme.

## What if I don't improve or things get worse?

It is quite normal for self-management to take time to work, and it may feel uncomfortable as you try new things or increase your activity levels. These side-effects should settle quickly as your body gets used to the new demands you are placing on it.

**If your symptoms get worse, please do not hesitate to contact your physiotherapist for advice. However, if you think you need urgent medical help at ANY point during this process, please contact your GP or the NHS 111 service (call 111 or complete an online self-assessment [HERE](#)) for assistance.**

## Exercise

**Unless your physio has told you otherwise, we recommend trying to build regular short periods of activity into your day.**

For example, try not to sit, stand or lie in one position for more than 10-15 minutes. If you know a particular position is painful, try to move around before you start to stiffen up.

If you do any regular form of exercise or physical activity, if it is not making you feel worse (either at the time or for a day or two afterwards), please keep doing this and listen to your body. Effort, stretch and a degree of discomfort is fine, but do not try to push through pain.

Even a few minutes of activity, such as walking, swimming or yoga can be helpful for your mental and physical health.

## Understanding pain and medication for pain relief

**Pain is a very personal experience, which can be frustrating and difficult to explain.** Understanding the different types of pain and how to manage them is an important part of the self-management process.

The NHS has a 10-step guide to help reduce pain by managing your exercise levels, sleep and looking after your mental health. You can access this advice [here](#).

In terms of taking medication for pain relief – it's common to worry that you will only "mask" the pain and cause more damage. Please be reassured that in almost all cases it is more helpful to control the pain - making it easier for you to start moving more naturally. If you have been taking over-the-counter or prescribed medication for a long time to manage your pain, please talk to your GP or pharmacist about a review and/or other medications to help.

However, if you have followed the advice above and find that...

- **Your pain is not improving as you would expect**
- **Your pain is longstanding (often referred to as chronic pain)**
- **You would like to understand more about what causes pain**

...please watch the following video - [Understanding pain: What to do about it in less than 5 minutes](#).

We also recommend you look at the following webpage - [Pain and the brain - Live Well with Pain](#) - which has lots of information about pain and how to help manage it.

## General health and how it can impact on pain

We all know that we need to eat healthily, sleep well, not smoke, not drink too much and get more exercise. Unfortunately, life does not always make this easy to do!

However – your general health can have a major impact on how your pain behaves. For example:

- Smoking and poor sleep quality **delay how well your body repairs itself**
- Drinking alcohol can **increase pain as it may cause inflammation**
- Being underweight leads to **an increased risk of fracture due to thinner bones (osteoporosis)**
- Being overweight **places more load through your back and legs**, which can result in **excessive wear (osteoarthritis)** of your joints

If you struggle with your general health, you can access information and support on the NHS's Better Health webpage here - [Better Health – NHS](#).

If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, visit [Fall asleep faster and sleep better - Every Mind Matters – NHS](#).

## Mental health and how it can impact on pain

**Your physical health can affect your mental health – and vice-versa.** Our bodies and minds are not separate, so it is not surprising that if you feel low in mood or have issues with your mental health, it can affect your body.

If you are struggling with your mental health, please read the following information from the NHS which gives further information about the link between physical and mental health and how to help manage these: [Mental health and physical illness - Every Mind Matters – NHS](#).

**What life throws at us** can also impact our pain, physical and mental health. For example, dealing with loss and bereavement, concerns about work, money worries and maintaining healthy relationships (with yourself as well as other people).

If you need advice and support on these challenges, we recommend you access the NHS's [Dealing with Life's Challenges](#) site.