

Patient information

Chronic pain self-management Stretching, exercise and posture

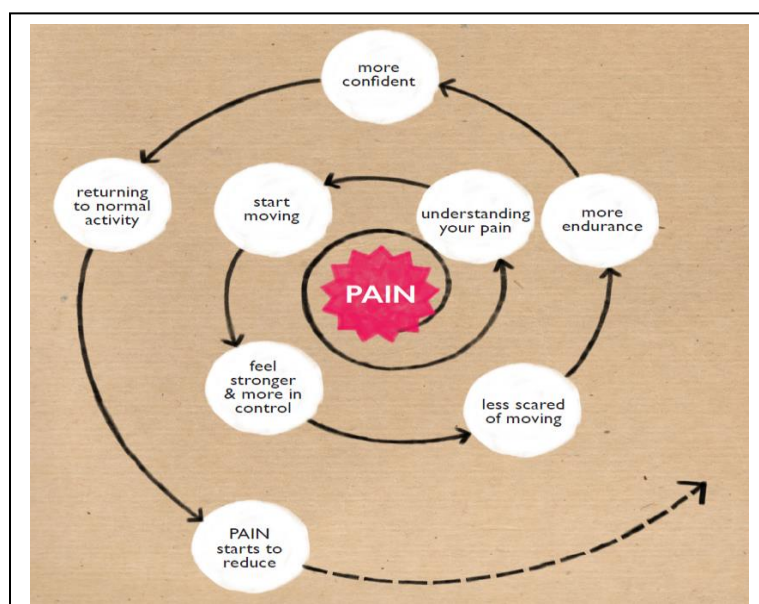
How pain affects activity



As illustrated above, pain may cause us to avoid normal movement and everyday activities. If something hurts when we move it, we have a tendency to keep it still or 'guard it'. With chronic pain, this is not useful; keeping still may cause more harm than good and could actually cause more pain in the future.

The positive effect of activity on pain

Diagram from *Understanding Persistent Pain, how to turn down the volume on persistent pain, Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmanian Government. (2014)*



Exercise

There are three main elements to exercise, which are the three 'S's:

- Suppleness
- Strength
- Stamina

The body needs all three 'S's in order to function properly.

The aim is to find an exercise level you can do on both good and bad days, so don't expect to progress quickly. It is better to do too few exercises in the early stages than too many and give up! Do your exercises slowly, smoothly and without jerking.

If a particular exercise causes an increase in pain during or after the session, don't just stop doing the exercise instead make the movement smaller so that you can still do the exercise rather than avoiding it.

Ask for help where needed. Do remember to stick to **your** goals, and don't be tempted to try too many.

Exercise and movement can help:

- **Suppleness** - by gently stretching the soft tissues around the joints you will decrease the risk of sprain resulting from sudden movements, you may also achieve the range of movement needed for everyday activities.
- **Strength** - through exercise you work muscles that may have been working inefficiently or not at all. The muscles are then able to protect and support the joints, putting less strain on the body.
- **Stamina** - so we have the power to keep doing an activity without tiring, and so reducing the risk of injury.
- **Better circulation** - as a result of improved performance of your heart and lungs, keeps the joints and muscles healthy.
- **Good posture** - so there is less strain on the joints.
- **Weight** - through regular exercise you increase your metabolic rate, thereby burning off extra calories and reducing your body fat store, so there is less strain on the joints and whole body.

- **Co-ordination** - so movement is smooth and safe to enable us to have good balance.
- **Decrease in pain information** - by closing 'the pain gate' and by giving a feeling of well-being, which may be due to natural chemicals released from the brain.

Exercise is good for you!



Good news!

- Deconditioning is reversible.
- Fit tissues, bodies and minds are less prone to injury and pain.
- Activity soon improves tissue health and strength.
- Being physically active causes your body to release chemicals which help to lift your mood and encourage you to feel more relaxed www.csp.org.uk/publications/fit-active-work

Exercise tips

There are some basic principles that have been shown to be helpful when starting an exercise programme:

- Aim to find a level that is manageable on good and bad days.
- Do not expect to progress too quickly – be realistic.
- If you start gently and build slowly you should minimise unnecessary aches and pains.

- Pick an exercise you enjoy.
- Listen to 'feel good' music.
- Exercises with family / friends / join a group.
- Choose appropriate clothing / footwear.
- Choose an appropriate environment.
- Warm up and warm down and stretch.
- Remember that aches and pains after activity are normal.
- If you have a flare up of symptoms try to keep active and manage the flare up.
- You should be able to whistle or talk whilst exercising. If you cannot, you may be overdoing it.
- Reward yourself.
- Keep a record - it can be useful and motivating to track your progress.
- Make it routine.
- Do not put it off - try to identify the excuses you are likely to use and factor this into your plan.

Maybe you can add ideas to this list you have found useful in the past.

Stretch and relax

Stretching is good for us and makes us feel good. It keeps us flexible and supple. When you first start to stretch do it gently, slowly and smoothly.

Stretches are best performed when your muscles are warm, for example after a warm bath or shower.

Basic stretches: Try these basic stretches:



NB: Upper knee should be directly above lower knee.



Back stretch

Lie on your back, hands above your head. Bend your knees and roll them slowly to one side, keeping your feet on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.



Knees to chest

Lie on your back, knees bent. Bring one knee up and pull it gently into your chest for 5 seconds. Repeat up to 5 times on each side.



Pelvic tilt

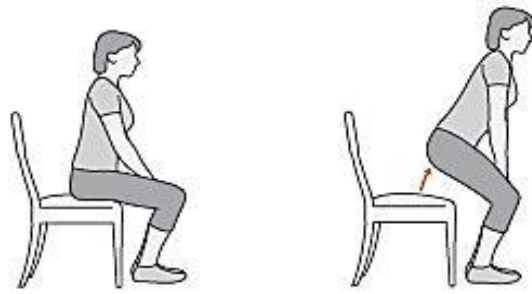
Lie down with your knees bent. Tighten your stomach muscles flattening your back against the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

Back arching

Take a deep breath in and round your back towards the ceiling.

Let your head drop down a little. Then relax the back letting your tailbone rise in the air. Repeat 5 to 10 times, working within your comfort range. You will gradually be able to build up the number of exercises and the range of movement.





Sit/stands

Sit on a chair. Without using your hands for support, stand up and then sit back down. Make sure each movement is slow and controlled. Repeat for 1 minute. As you improve, try to increase the number of sit/stands you can do in 1 minute and try the exercise from lower chairs or the bottom two steps of a staircase.

Remember

- Go slowly
- Stop at the point of pull, not pain
- Breathe out
- Allow time for your muscles to loosen
- Start where you are comfortable. It is fine to start with 1 repetition of a small range of movement if that feels right and safe for you.
- Try to build up gradually over time.

You should expect to suffer a mild aching sensation on the following day after starting these exercises, but not a flare up in your pain. If your pain increases significantly, continue the exercises, but at a more gentle level. You will be shown how to do these exercises.

There are many other exercises and ways to exercise. At the end of this leaflet you will find a list of just some of the exercise programmes, services and classes that are available in our area. Many of these are aimed at people who are new to exercise or returning to exercise after a long break and are suitable for people with medical conditions.

You can self-refer for one-to-one physiotherapy through Allied Health Professionals Suffolk (AHPS) on tel. 0333 0433 966.

A physiotherapist can help you to address issues around your posture or progress an exercise programme.

Posture

Correct posture and transfer of your body weight in movement is really important for good health. If you adopt the correct postures for the tasks you do at work and at home, your back, neck and other joints will remain healthy and strong, you'll breathe freely, reduce your risk of developing problems and your internal organs will be able to work more efficiently.

Poor posture is often the result of bad habits developed over a lifetime, such as slouching, but can also result from:

- Obesity
- Stress and anxiety
- Fatigue
- Poor lifting and handling technique

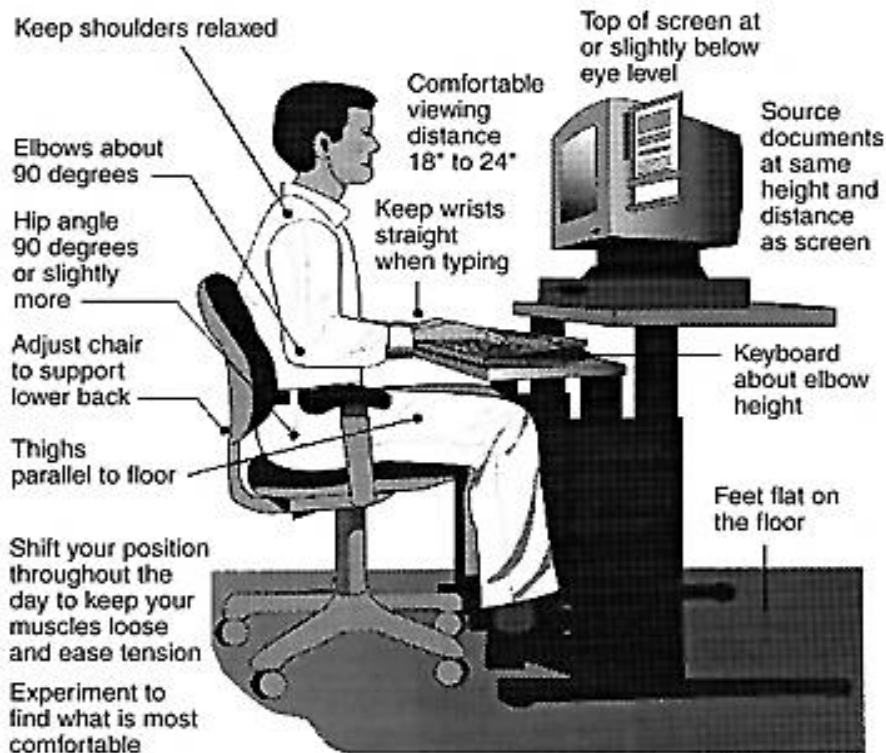
In a good posture, your spine, shoulder and hip joints will all be in correct alignment. You should aim to keep your feet hip distance apart and your arms close to your body. Viewed from the back, your spine would appear straight. From the side, the spine would have three natural curves, similar to the letter 'S'.

Whether you are standing, sitting or leaning you should aim to avoid undue stress and strain on your joints. This will help you feel:

- Stronger
- Less tired
- Fewer aches and pains

Reference: www.csp.org.uk/publications/fit-active-work

Sitting



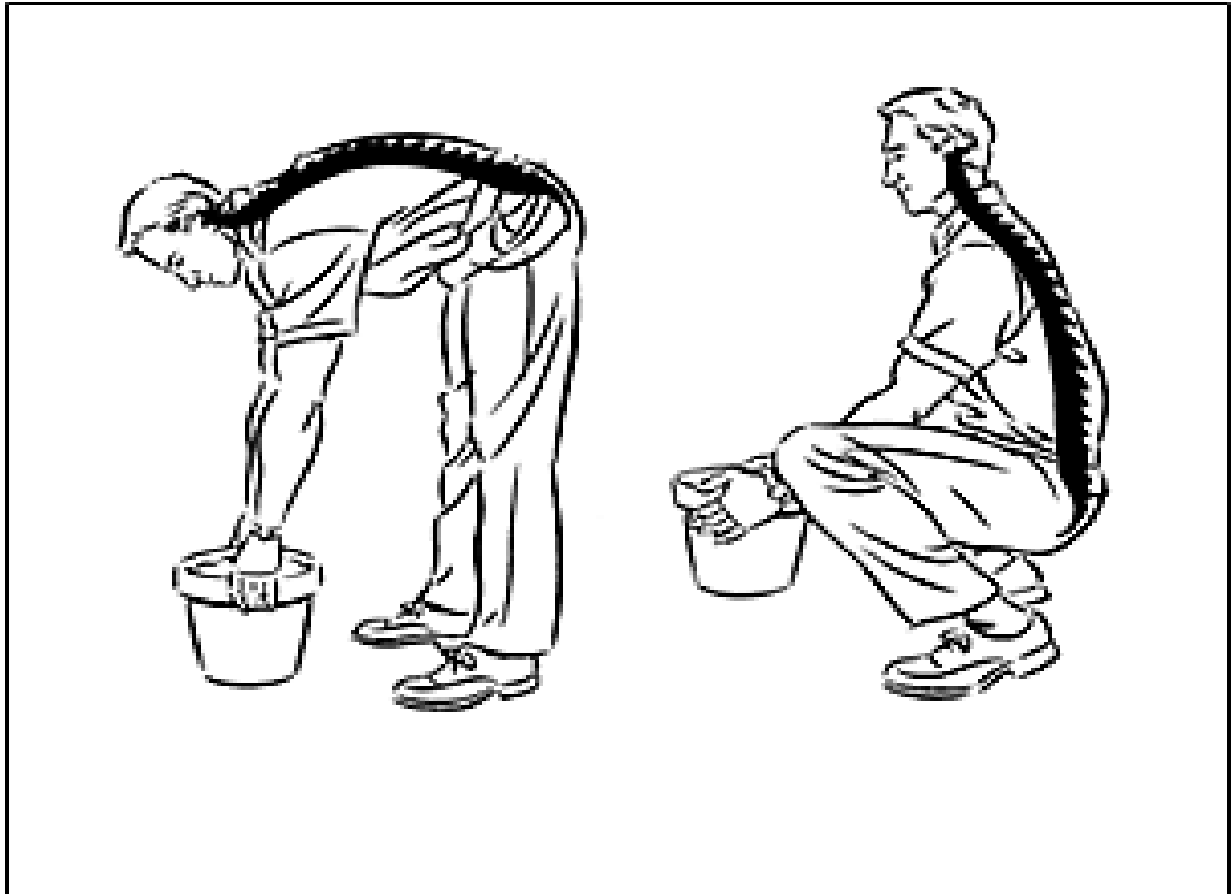
Good posture involves training your body to stand, walk and sit in positions where the least strain is placed on supporting muscles and ligaments. A healthy posture keeps bones and joints in the correct alignment so that muscles can be used properly. Good posture also contributes to a good appearance.

If using a computer, or driving etc., try to relax your grip on the mouse or steering wheel, to release tension in your arms, elbows, shoulders and neck.

Hip joints should be slightly higher than your knees. The angle between leg and torso should be greater than 90 degrees.

Correct lifting technique

- Maintain the natural curves of your spine.
- Use the large muscles in your thighs and buttocks to take the strain.
- Feet should be shoulder width apart.
- Hold object to be lifted close to your body.



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<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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