Persistent Pain

Each of us will experience pain at some point during our lives, though not all of us will experience chronic pain. For pain to be considered 'chronic', it must persist or recur for more than three months (World Health Organisation, 2021).

There are many reasons why pain may persist in some people and not others. To understand why this can happen, and to help reduce such risk, it's important to understand pain.

Understanding the Pain System

Pain may be defined as 'an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage.' (International Society for the Study of Pain, 2020). It serves as the body's alarm system, a warning system of potential dangers.

In acute cases, this is helpful. However, in persistent pain states, the warning is simply our body's best effort at letting us know a threat may exist. Often, this is not in response to actual tissue damage.

The Response of the Pain System to Injury

Injury to the body leads to a change in tolerance, or function, of the affected tissue, and increases how sensitive the area is.

This results in a smaller stimulus (e.g. movement, stretch or activity) being required for a pain response to occur.

These are demonstrated in the 'Tissue Tolerance' and 'Protect by Pain' thresholds in the image.

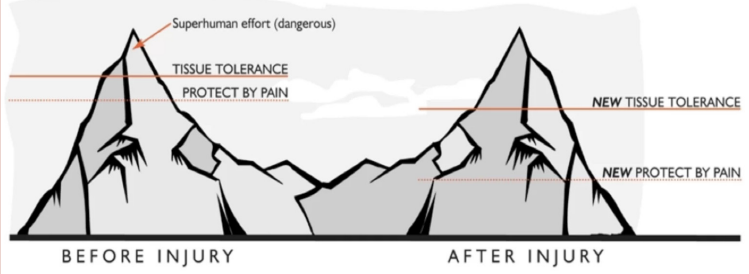


Image from book Explain Pain by David Butler and Lorimer Mosely.

At least in the acute phase following an injury, this is a normal change which helps to regulate what you do as you recover.

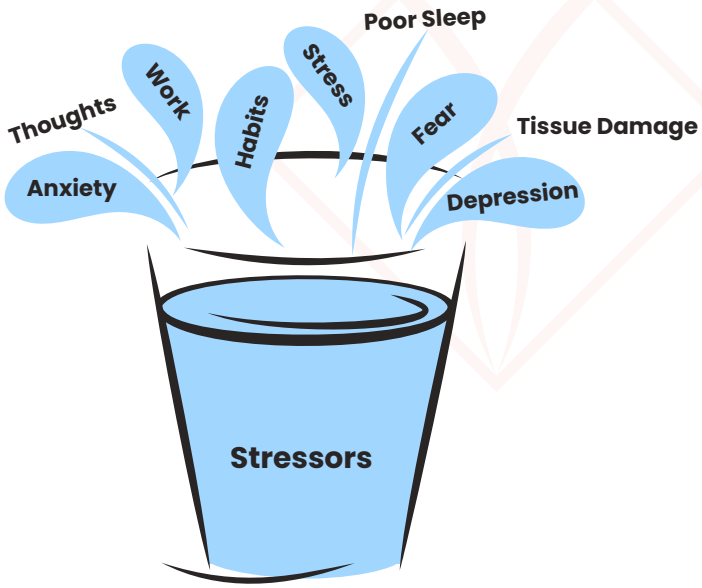
For instance, if you sprain your ankle playing sport then simply walking on it afterwards may be enough to bring about a pain response; this discourages you from returning to sport too soon and worsening the condition.

However, if this increased sensitivity persists, your pain system may send warning signals in the absence of a threat to your tissues.

In persistent pain states, many factors other than our tissues, contribute to the pain experience. These include, but are not limited to, our thoughts and beliefs, general health, stress and social situations.

Facts about Persistent Pain

- Pain is normal, personal and always real
- There are danger sensors, not pain sensors
- Pain and tissue damage rarely relate
- Pain depends on the balance of danger and safety
- Pain relies on context
- Human brains are neuroplastic; the ability of the brain to adapt or change over time in response to experiences
- Active treatment strategies promote recovery



Contributing Factors:
Pain - The Cup Theory

Pain occurs when your cup overflows

Management of Persistent Pain Considers all Behaviours that Influence Pain

This may include:

- Exercise and activity
- Pairing of activities and rest at the right time
- A good social support system
- Stress reduction, including meditation and body scanning
- Healthy sleep habits
- Healthy diet
- Contact with nature
- Reduce pro-inflammatory habits, such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and inactivity
- Autonomy; the sense that you have control and can make meaningful decisions
- Personal beliefs and attitude towards pain

Useful Resources

YouTube:

Snake bite: Why Things Hurt: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwd-wLdlHjs
Explain pain: Some Key Points in Pain Education: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_3phB93rvI
Joe's Story of Lower Back Pain: https://youtu.be/dQ9SsoF5kQI

Books:

Explain Pain Second Edition. Author: David S. Butler & G. Lorimer Moseley): https://www.noigroup.com/product/explain-pain-second-edition/
Bodily Relearning: Reteaching Bodily Protection Responses Through Insight and Movement Exploration.
Author: Benjamin S. Boyd: https://www.noigroup.com

Podcasts/Apps/Websites:

Podcast: Tell Me About Your Pain (Curable and Alan Gordon): https://www.curablehealth.com/podcast/your-pain
Apps: Curable: https://www.curablehealth.com
My Pain Hub (for low back pain, neck pain and knee osteoarthritis): https://mypainhub.com/
Website: Evoolve Pain Care Academy: https://evoolvepaincare.academy/home