

What Is Pain?

Explain Pain

Each of us will experience pain at some point in our lives. But what exactly is pain and why do we feel it? This page will help you understand that pain is a conscious human experience that requires a brain and the whole person in their world. Explaining pain is now accepted as evidence-based pain treatment.

What is Pain?

Pain is defined as 'an unpleasant conscious experience that emerges from the brain when the sum of all the available information suggests that you need to protect a particular part of your body' (Dr. Lorimer Mosely).

Let's break that down into its key components:

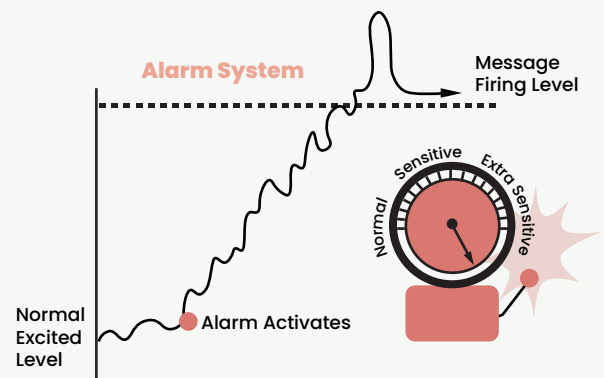
- ❖ Pain emerges from the brain. Pain is 100% of the time an output produced by the brain. All pain, no matter how it feels or how long you've had it.
- ❖ Pain acts to protect your body. In the short-term setting, pain is a normal and necessary response that is vital for tissue healing.

Essentially, pain acts as an 'alarm system' of the body, a protective mechanism to warn you that there may be a potential threat to your body.

Example:

If you touch a hot surface, your nervous system sends a message to the brain which activates the alarm, causing your brain to put out a pain signal so that you instinctively pull your hand away, to prevent burning your hand.

The pain, and your body's reaction, stops you from hurting yourself further.



Acute Pain

Acute pain (or short-term pain) happens suddenly, starts out sharp or intense, and serves as a warning sign of disease or threat to the body. It is caused by injury, surgery, illness, trauma, or painful medical procedures and generally lasts from a few minutes to less than three months. Acute pain usually disappears whenever the underlying cause is treated or healed. (IASP definition).

Persistent Pain

Chronic pain, also called persistent pain, is pain that lasts for more than 3 months, or in many cases, beyond normal healing time. Persistent pain is a complex condition. Everyone experiences it differently. The pain can range from mild to severe and is usually experienced on most days.

In the case of persistent pain, your alarm system becomes more sensitive and more easily activated. This is termed a 'hyper-sensitive pain system'.

