
Flare Ups

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to help you manage a flare-up of a pre-existing pain problem as well as how to plan for future flare-ups or setbacks.

Managing Flare Ups:

Coping with persistent pain also means coming to terms with the fact that your symptoms will vary from time to time. Flare-ups happen and trying to find a reason for a flare up can create more anxiety, further sensitise your nervous system, and worsen your pain. What we know about flare ups is that there can sometimes be no pattern or obvious trigger to explain them. They can be unpredictable. This can be very frustrating.

Rather than trying to look back over what you did or did not do to cause the flare-up, or planning for every way you might avoid flare-ups in the future, it is simply better to acknowledge that you are having a flare-up. That you have a condition that flares up and that it is what it is. This is called acceptance.

You need to face your flare-up by being kind and gentle with yourself in the present. Don't think you have done anything wrong. Allow yourself some space to feel the sadness, anger, and frustration etc. before engaging with how you want to be in the next part of your day



Instead of focusing on things beyond your control, make choices in areas that you do have influence over. These choices will assist you in managing this flare up and your health as best you can.



This may involve:

- ✓ Adjusting your medication
 - ✓ Pacing your activities
 - ✓ Meditating
 - ✓ Adjusting your exercises
 - ✓ Having a suitable period of rest – no more than 48 hours
 - ✓ Reminding yourself that flare-ups pass
 - ✓ Shifting your attention away from “why?” to other things (sounds, people, and activities) in your present environment
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Do consider writing your thoughts down just as they are. This is a key strategy from ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy) which is a well recognised psychological approach to pain management. Writing thoughts down strengthens the “observing part of you” to be able to step out of a negative spiral of thoughts and feelings. While you cannot control whether you have negative thoughts and feelings, you can choose what to do next. You can choose to believe the thoughts (like “I can’t do anything” or “I am a failure”) or you can see them as just thoughts which come and go and may or may not be true.



Our approach emphasizes that it is best to be guided by what your experience tells you is doable rather than what your thoughts tell you that you “should” be able to do. Therefore, give yourself permission to take small steps in the direction of meaningful activities if you are unable to do as much as you would like. Even if they are small steps, they are still in the direction of what matters to you.

Remember your flare up will pass and being accepting will help

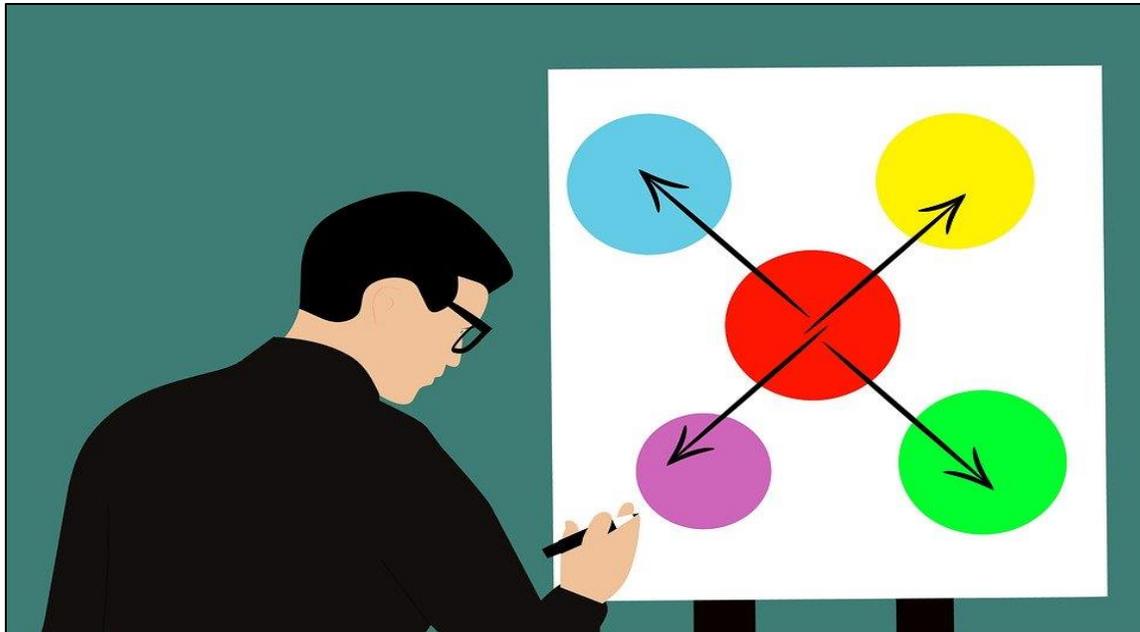


Planning for flare ups:

Flare ups are inevitable. They are part of having a persistent pain problem.

With this in mind it is important that you plan how you are going to deal with your flare ups. We call this having a flare-up plan, or set-back plan.

Those recovering from persistent pain have told us that as their pain management skills improve, their flare ups get less frequent, less intense and easier to cope with. Planning is a part of this process.



Here is an example of a one person's personal flare-up plan.

What strategies will help me during a flare-up?	How can I commit to these strategies during a flare up? How can I make these strategies achievable?
<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Halve the number of exercises initially. Build up gradually to previous levels over a period of two weeks</i>
<i>Heat</i>	<i>Use a hot pack on a regular basis (4 times a day)</i>
<i>Mindfulness</i>	<i>Practise the 5 minute breathing space every hour</i>
<i>Relaxation</i>	<i>Listen to my relaxation CD and practise the technique twice a day for 15 minutes</i>
<i>Distraction</i>	<i>Watch my favourite TV programme Read a magazine twice a day for 10 mins</i>
<i>Pacing</i>	<i>Drop my pacing time limits by roughly 25% for the next week</i>
<i>Be kind to myself</i>	<i>Treat myself to.....</i>



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 before. It might include a hot water bottle, an exercise sheet with some gentle stretches, or some distraction activities like a good book or DVD.

Once your flare up has settled down it is a good idea to reflect on how your plan worked or not, learn from it and then adjust your plan. You may even choose to set aside some time to acknowledge (and even write about) your feelings now or later. To prompt this it can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- What might have contributed to this flare up?
- What worked well managing it?
- What didn't go so well?
- What were the positives?
- What might you do differently next time?



For further information

Please ring on 0191 2138800 or visit our website at: www.tims.nhs.uk which provides online guidance and support on managing your musculoskeletal (MSK) condition effectively.

The NHS website also provides trusted online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare to help you manages your condition and/or inform your choices about your health:

www.nhs.net

Useful links

The patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information and the NHS. You can contact them on Freephone **0800 032 02 02** or email northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk



Tyneside Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

TIMS is a partnership between Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust