

Activity management

It is not always helpful when making decisions on **how** or **when** to engage in activity, to base these decisions on how you are feeling at that time. People with pain or other health conditions tend to do two common things:

Basing what activities you do, or how much you do them, on 'how you feel' is not always helpful in the long term: after all, you know that ***pain is not always a reliable message***. People with pain or other health problems tend to do two common things:

- Avoid doing things because they are worried that movement will make them feel worse
- Try to ignore their pain by pushing through it, and then have to face 'paying' for it later

In reality, most people tend to do a combination of both of these: it can depend on the day, the severity of the symptoms, the support (or lack of) from the people around, how *important* the activity is right now...and a host of other factors.

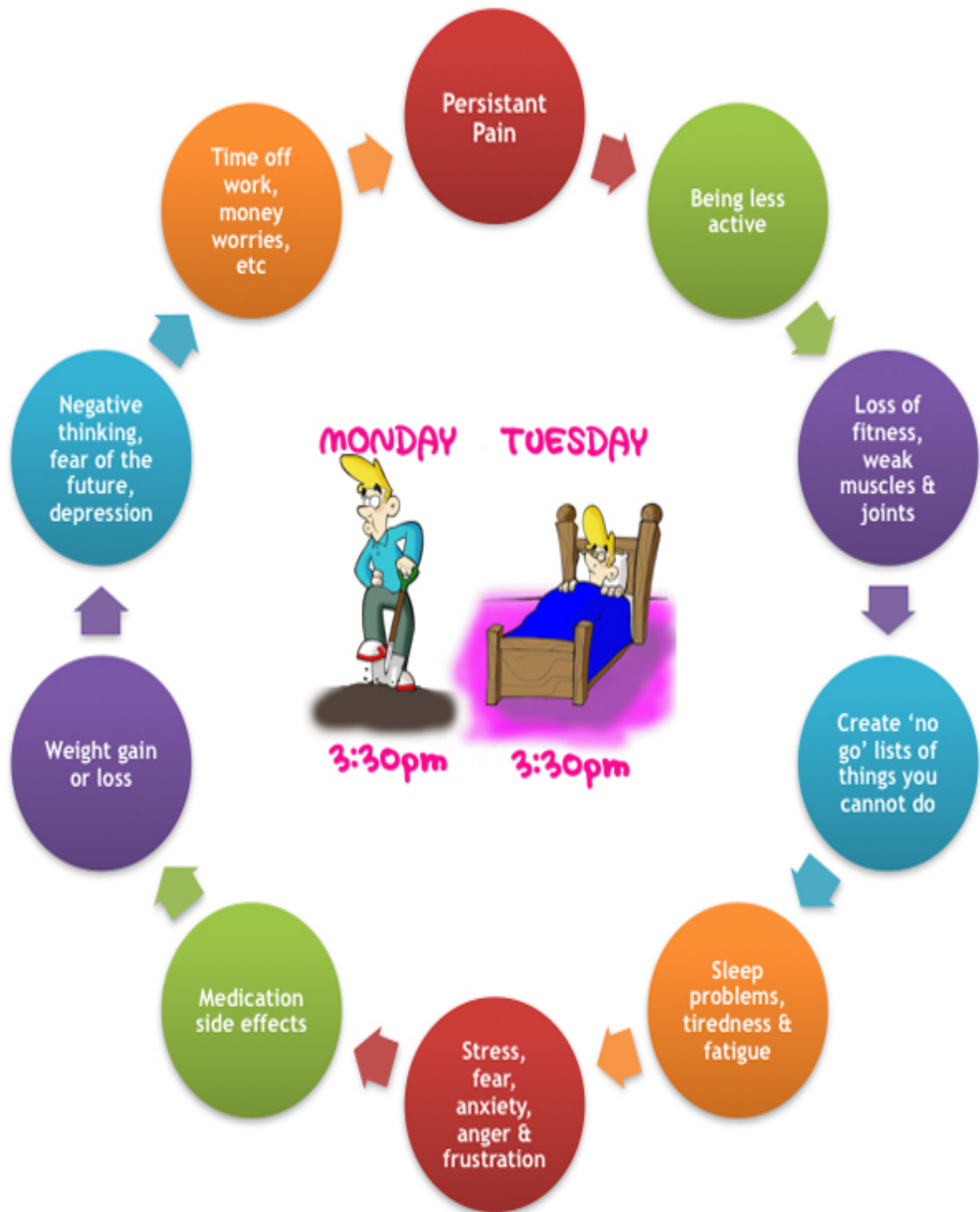
Activity cycling

Avoiding an activity or movement is not helpful in the long term. It can lead to:

- Reduced confidence in your ability to do the actual or similar activity
- Reduced movement efficiency
- Fatigue and yet also poor sleep patterns
- Loss of contact and shared experiences with friends and family
- Frustration, loss of a sense of purpose...and a range of other emotions
- And most importantly, loss of doing what is really important to you

On the other hand, you may use 'good days' to play catch-up with all those jobs you have been putting off because of your pain and so end up overdoing things. You may then experience more pain and feel that you need to take time to rest and recover. We call this 'activity cycling': overactivity which is usually followed by a period of underactivity. This way of trying to manage activity is understandable and is very common in people experiencing persistent pain. The trouble is, in the long term, it can have the same consequence as avoiding activity: it can lead to reduced confidence and fitness and the loss of the enjoyable aspects of life such as seeing friends and pursuing leisure interests.

Sometimes recognising that you are in a negative cycle can be the first step to making a positive difference in your life. Overleaf is an example of a negative cycle of pain from the Pain Toolkit....



Taken from- (<http://www.paintoolkit.org/pain-cycle>)

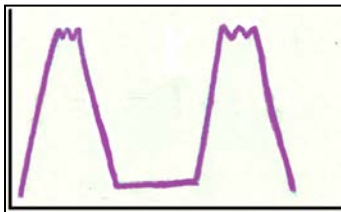
Patterns of activity

There is no 'right or wrong' pattern to be in. It is important to be aware of these patterns of activity, and notice which ones you can relate to and then consider; "is this working for me?" and "what effect does this have on my overall activity levels?" Can you see yourself in one of these patterns?



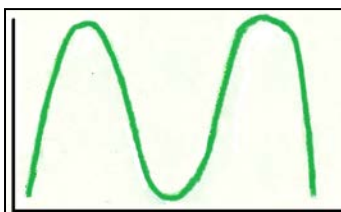
Pain Suppressor/Overdoing

Tendency to try and ignore pain or try and push through it



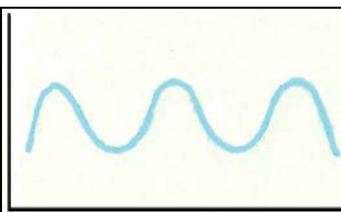
Pain Avoider

Might do bursts of activity at times during the day (e.g. as part of getting up, going to bed) but otherwise activity levels are low



Extreme Activity Cyclier ("Boom and Bust")

Tendency to do bursts of activity followed by having to rest to recover before doing more, and so on...



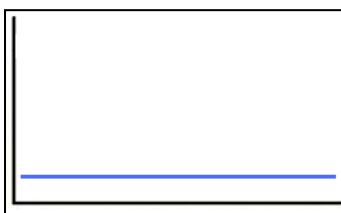
Moderate Activity Cyclier

Tendency to do some activity, followed by rest, then some more, and so on



"Just Do It"

Might chose to do a burst of activity as a one off



"Flat liner"

Activity levels remain low throughout the day (e.g. staying in bed, lying on the sofa) long term benefits and progression is limited.

*Adapted from McCracken, L. And Samuel, V.
(2007)*

Avoiding activity

Avoiding is not helpful in the long term: it can lead to reduced fitness, poor muscle efficiency, fatigue, and poor patterns of sleep. Sometimes it can lead you to feel disconnected from what is really important to you. You may have lost contact with friends and acquaintances. You may find less time for your hobbies and personal interests. It can become harder to do the things that help you to feel good about yourself.

Overdoing it on 'good days'

If you use 'good days' to play catch-up with all those jobs you have been putting off because of your pain, you can end up overdoing things. You may then experience more pain and feel that you need to take time to rest and recover. This way of trying to manage activity is understandable and is very common in people experiencing persistent pain. In the end this can have the same consequences as avoiding activity. It will lead to deconditioning, and the loss of the enjoyable aspects of life such as seeing friends and pursuing leisure interests.

Pushing through pain

It is important to remember the impact that pushing through your pain can have on your pain system. The chemical and nerve systems in your body can become sensitised. Certain movements or situations that you find yourself in will activate the pain system more quickly and this may result in your pain feeling more intense than usual. Struggling with not being able to do what you want to do, when you want to do it – can have an affect on how you feel emotionally. You can experience feeling frustrated, angry, upset and tearful at times. This impact on your emotional health will also contribute to releasing more chemicals into the system and wind your pain up further.

Useful ideas

Tools such as pedometers, diary sheets (daily activity patterns) and a personal diary or calendar (what you did during the day) are useful methods for measuring activity and helping to answer the question "what does my pattern look like".

These patterns may not be just day to day patterns, but also may run over weeks or months, and you may notice yourself fitting into more than one. By understanding how your activity patterns may affect your pain experience, this enables you to make informed decisions about what you choose to do, taking into account your values and what is important to you.

There may also be days when you want to “just do it”, for example spending the day at the park with your grandchildren. You may notice your symptoms more afterwards, but you were able to make an informed decision about this and choose whether it was worth it.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6.00							
7.00							
8.00							
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You can use this diary example to fill and input your daily activities to identify any activity patterns.