



## Be Pain Smart – Anxiety

### Winding down your stress

Learning ways to wind down your stress will help you to manage your pain.

A small amount of stress can be helpful because it can push you to get things done and to meet your goals. Too much stress can overwhelm you, make your pain worse and stop you from doing your normal activities. So, what is too much? This is when you have too much to do or manage but do not feel like you have enough resources or support to cope. Learning ways to wind down your stress will help you to manage your pain.

#### How can you wind your stress down?

You can start by learning ways to wind down your stress in the moment and use these tools to calm yourself down when you feel overwhelmed or really anxious. Check out ideas in the [‘calm down’](#), [‘managing emotions’](#) and [‘relaxation’](#) tools. It helps to practice these tools often and then you can use them when you feel very stressed or unable to cope.

#### ***But the problems might still be there...***

You will also need to spend time working on your problems to help you to cope with stress and manage your pain. There are simple steps you can learn to help you solve your problems.



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### Problem solving

Some problems are small and you can sort them out easily, while others are bigger issues that are much harder to fix. No matter what the problem is and whether it is big or small, if it does not get sorted out, it will make your stress levels and your pain worse over time.

People with chronic pain may experience more problems than most, or the pain might make it harder to fix these problems, but if you keep ignoring them, they will not go away. Often you get stuck fixing the same problems in the same way, but it never really makes a difference and acts like a band-aid. It can help to try new ways and ideas. You need to find the best solution, at that moment, to help you achieve your goals. To do this, it is often helpful to try a problem-solving approach. This can take a bit of time but this structured approach can give you a plan of attack.

### TIPS TO START PROBLEM SOLVING

- Make time to work on your problems. Set a time in your diary when you have no distractions or nothing else to do. This may seem odd, but you are trying to think of new ways to fix old problems and this takes 'thinking time'. Ask yourself, 'how much do I want to sort out this problem? Is giving up 20-30 minutes of my time worth it to fix it?'
- As you are getting the hang of this, start with some easier problems and as your confidence grows, then start hitting the bigger problems.

Read the steps below to help you to fix your problems.



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### The D.E.C.I.D.E steps for problem solving

D	E	C	I	D	E
<b>Define the problem</b>	<b>Explore all the different ways to fix the problem</b>	<b>Choose the best one by looking at the good and bad points</b>	<b>Identify the steps</b>	<b>Do it</b>	<b>Evaluate the plan</b>

### THE D.E.C.I.D.E STEPS IN DETAIL

<b>D Define the problem</b>	Be clear about what the problem is. It can help to rate the problem out of 10, so you can see how big it really is.
<b>E Explore all the different ways to fix the problem</b>	Come up with new ideas to work out the problem. Now is the time to try something different. The more ideas you come up with, the more likely you are to find a better solution to your problem. Try to be creative and do not rule anything out just yet.
<b>C Choose the best one by looking at the good and bad points</b>	You need to look at the good and bad points of the different ideas. After you do this, you can then choose the best one for you. Put the ideas in order from best to not so best.
<b>I Identify the steps</b>	Write down all the steps you need to do and then put them in the order that you need to carry them out. Try to think of any problems with the plan and plan around them. Make sure your plan is clear and has a timeframe.
<b>D Do it</b>	Go for it and carry-out your plan.
<b>E Evaluate the plan</b>	How did you go? At the end go over how things went and if need be where things went wrong. Some steps might need to be changed or new ones added in. It can help to think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what worked</li> <li>• what did not work</li> <li>• what needs to be changed? What could I do next time to make this work better</li> <li>• at what stage did things go wrong? Go back to this stage and start again.</li> </ul>



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If things worked, well done, you have fixed an old problem in a new way. Perhaps you can use some of these new tools for some other problems.

Read through the example below and then have a go at using the D.E.C.I.D.E steps to sort out a problem for yourself.

### The D.E.C.I.D.E steps of problem solving

#### Step 1. Define the problem

*My girlfriend's birthday is coming up. I told Sophia I would throw her a party to say thanks for all the stuff she does for me. It is three weeks away but I have not sorted out where we are having it, who is coming or any of the food or drinks.*



**Rate the problem (choose a number)**



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**Step 2.**

Explore all of the different ways to fix the problem

**Step 3.**

Choose the best one by looking at the good and bad points

SOLUTION	GOOD POINTS	BAD POINTS	ORDER
It would be good to have it at our place.	<p>I can set it up the day before and order food to be delivered.</p> <p>I can ask friends to bring food and drinks.</p> <p>During the party I can lay down for 10-15 minutes on my bed to ease my back pain.</p>	<p>I will need to clean the house, the day before the party. Whenever I do this it makes my pain worse and I then might not be okay for the party.</p>	2
We could go to her favourite restaurant	<p>Sophia loves the food there.</p> <p>I will not need to organise anything or carry anything to the restaurant.</p>	<p>It could be really expensive for everyone.</p> <p>I find it hard to sit down for longer than 30 minutes – I will need to get up a lot and move around. This could be hard because it is a small place.</p>	3
There is a local park which has views of the river. When we go for a walk there, Sophia always says it would be nice to have a picnic there.	<p>I do not need to clean up beforehand.</p> <p>I can ask friends to help me carry the food and picnic stuff, and we can set it up together.</p> <p>She keeps on saying that she would like to go there for a picnic so it will be special.</p> <p>I can take a camping chair to sit on and change position every 20 minutes.</p>	<p>It will be hard to carry all the food and picnic stuff to the picnic spot.</p> <p>It might not be as personal as being in our own home.</p> <p>I can only sit for 30 minutes and not on the floor.</p>	1



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### Step 4. Identify the steps

ORDER	STEPS
2	Ask two or three friends to help carry the food and set-up the picnic area
4	Order the food and drinks
3	Sort out how we are going to get there – my mate Barry said he will drive us
6	Buy the plates, serviettes, knives, and forks etc
5	Order a cake
1	Let everyone know where the picnic will be and remind them of the time and date
7	Pack everything before we go

### Step 5. Do it





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### Step 6. Evaluate the plan

Ask yourself the following questions

#### Did it work?

*Yeah it went pretty well. Sophia was really happy, and I managed my pain okay during the picnic. I could get up the next day and still do my normal stuff.*

#### What worked?

*Getting others to help early on, setting my timer to move every 20 minutes. It also helped that I did not spend the day before the party cleaning up or setting up the party. If I had done that – I would not have lasted.*

#### What did not work?

*It was a long way to walk from the car with lots of heavy things.*



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### What needs to be changed? What could I do next time to make this better?

*Next time I would get Barry to drop me closer to the picnic area.*

### At what stage did things go wrong (go back to this stage and start again)?

*Nothing really went wrong. I had got there early enough to get over the long walk before the others came. Next time I could ask more people to help out – everyone was happy to.*

Now it is your turn to have a go at using the D.E.C.I.D.E steps to sort out a problem in your life.







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## Step 4. Identify the steps

**ORDER   STEPS**

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## Step 5. Do it



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## Step 6. Evaluate the plan

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**Did it work?**

**What worked?**

**What did not work?**



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At what stage did things go wrong (go back to this stage and start again)?