



Be Pain Smart – Pain

Flare-up

Your pain will change over time – some days will be good and some will be harder. This is very common when you have chronic pain. If you manage your pain well, over time there will be less ups and downs.

Flare-ups can have a big impact on you and your life. The best way to manage your next flare-up is to make a plan now (when things are okay) for what you will do when your pain gets worse; then, when a flare-up happens you will feel safe and know what to do.

There is not any one (or perfect) way to deal with a pain flare-up – it is a good idea to have different tools and work out which one is the best for you at that time. Remember, some tools will work better at different times, so if your usual tricks are not working then try something else.

It is best to work in stages. Most flare-ups only last about a day, so start with a plan based around a day. If the flare-up lasts longer, then change your plan to manage this.

Remember – this will pass.

Making a plan to manage flare-ups

Now it is time to make your flare-up plan. There are two parts.



Avoiding a flare-up

The first step is to think about the things that can trigger a flare-up for you. This could be activities, some movements or positions, or it could be because you have done too much. A flare-up might also happen after a big stressor or change in your life. The things that set-off your flare-up are your red flags. The next step is to think of ways to avoid these red flags – these are your green flags – the things you can do to prevent and stop the flare-up.



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Here are some ideas for **red flags**

Cleaning the shower – it usually takes me an hour to scrub the toilet, bath and shower – all that bending leaves me in agony.

When the grandkids come over, I cook and clean for hours the day before and then clean up after them. The next day I cannot even get out of bed.

After going to the doctors, my back always aches the next day and I can hardly move. Driving there and waiting for so long means I am sitting down most of the day.

I had a huge fight with my girlfriend last night. She does not understand what it is like to have pain all the time. Today my pain is ten times worse and I do not feel like doing anything.

Here are the matching **green flags**

I can break the cleaning up into 20-minute sessions each day. It might be frustrating at first, but at least my pain won't get worse and I can then do other things later in the day.

I made and froze a lasagne last week for lunch and my daughter is bringing dessert. I will tidy the main rooms for 30 mins each day the week before and get my daughter to help clean up after.

Before I go the doctor I will ring ahead to see if they are running on time. I will break up the drive into shorter timeframes. I will change positions every 15 minutes and do my stretches while I wait.

Next time I will wait until my girlfriend is not too tired to have a big talk. I will try to listen to her first and then talk about how I feel, rather than jumping in first and thinking she will not understand how I feel.



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Think about what your **red flags** are – write them in the space below. Then think about some **green flags** that could work for you.

Your **red flags**

Your **green flags**



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Now that you have made a plan to try to avoid flare-ups, you need to make a plan for when they do happen.

Think about the things that help to manage your pain and the things that make you feel good. Also think about the things that do not help when you have a flare-up.

Once you have thought about these, write down your plan with 10 things you can do during a flare-up.

My plan to manage a flare-up example

What things help me during a flare-up?

Taking rest breaks.

Doing some Tai Chi.

Calling Paul, my friend – he has chronic pain, too.

Using a heat pack.

What things make me feel good?

I love listening to music – it really calms me down.

I have a favourite candle that I love the smell of.

Watching my favourite comedy show.

What does not help?

Lying in bed – I just focus on my pain all day and it makes it worse.

Going on Facebook or Instagram – it just reminds me of all the things I am missing out on.



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My plan to manage a flare-up example

1. *Change my daily plan – add in extra rest breaks*
2. *Call my friend Paul – he has chronic pain too – we agreed to call each other when we need to talk or when the pain gets too much*
3. *Music – have my favourite songs ready on my phone*
4. *Do my breathing meditation with my favourite candle burning*
5. *Watch my favourite comedy show*
6. *Do some of my exercises or go for a short walk*
7. *Use my heat pack*
8. *Have a relaxing bath*
9. *Do some Tai Chi – have a YouTube clip ready to follow*
10. *Play video games*

When the flare-up settles down, remember to think about how you coped with the flare – what helped, what did not help and what you could do to make it easier next time?



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Now it is your turn to have a go.

My plan to manage a flare-up

Think about the things that help to manage your pain, plus the things that make you feel good. Also think about the things that do not help when you have a flare-up?

Once you have thought about these, write down your plan with 10 things you can do during a flare-up to help you manage the pain.

What things help me during a flare-up?

What things make me feel good?

What does not help?



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My plan to manage a flare-up

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Remember, you have coped with flare-ups before – you will cope this time.





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Some tips to manage a flare-up

Stop and think. Take a breath and think about what is happening in your body right now. Then it is time to put your plan into action.

Get in early. Change your plan for the day, add in rest breaks and learn the signs and things that might trigger a flare-up.

During your rest breaks. Do some gentle stretches – yoga or tai chi can really help OR spend five minutes doing some deep breathing or another relaxation exercise. Try to slow your breathing down and release the tension from your muscles.

Have some thought swaps ready. During pain flare-ups, it is easy for the unhelpful thoughts to come back and make your pain worse. Have some thought swaps ready to use during these times.

UNHELPFUL THOUGHT

THOUGHT SWAP

My pain is worse – it will never go away.



I know I cannot make my pain go away entirely, but I can cope with this.

When I have a flare-up, I cannot cope with the pain.



I have coped before and I can do it again.

The pain is so bad, it feels like I will be stuck like this forever.



Even when it gets really bad – I know it will not stay like this forever.

When the pain is so bad, it makes me feel so stressed and angry.



I will try to keep myself as calm as possible.

Connect with others. Try to distract yourself from the pain – call a friend or do a quiet activity. It can help to talk with someone who understands and who will help you with your flare-up plan.

Ask for help. Remember, people want to help and it is okay to ask for it when you need it – be clear with people about what you need.



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Remind yourself, a flare-up does not mean you have failed. Keep going with all the work you have been doing, keep moving and pacing your activities and you will get back to your normal routine soon.

Make sure you **STOP...**

- **pushing through with an activity** – it is easy to think that you can keep going until you are done, even if it makes the pain worse, but it does not help your flare-up if you do too much in one go
- **resting in bed for the day** – a long lie down can feel like the best option but too much rest can make things harder in the future
- **using more pain medication** – during a flare-up, extra pain medication can sometimes help, but if you are having a lot of flare-ups it can make things worse over time. It is good to learn that you can cope with the pain without more medication
- **visiting the doctor** – often the doctor cannot help during a flare-up, but sometimes it can be helpful for the doctor to reassure you that this is just a flare-up and things are not getting worse.

When the flare-up is over, think about what did and did not work and change your plan so it works better next time.