



Be Pain Smart – Anxiety

Building up bit-by-bit

Break out of the cycle of anxiety by building up your activity level. Start with something small and build up bit-by-bit, slowly over time.

Everyone feels anxious at times. It is normal to feel anxious in scary situations, but it can become a problem when you start to feel anxious in lots of different situations and places, stopping you from doing things you want or need to do.

Having ongoing anxiety is common after a brain injury and when you have chronic pain. It can feel overwhelming and like you are trapped. Bigger problems start when you stop doing an activity because of these feelings. This leads to something called 'fear avoidance'.

You become fearful of doing an activity because your brain sees it as a danger or threat, so you start to avoid or escape doing it. This eases your feelings in the moment, but in the long run it makes your anxiety grow, which means you do less over time. It can turn into a hard cycle to break.

Anxiety cycle

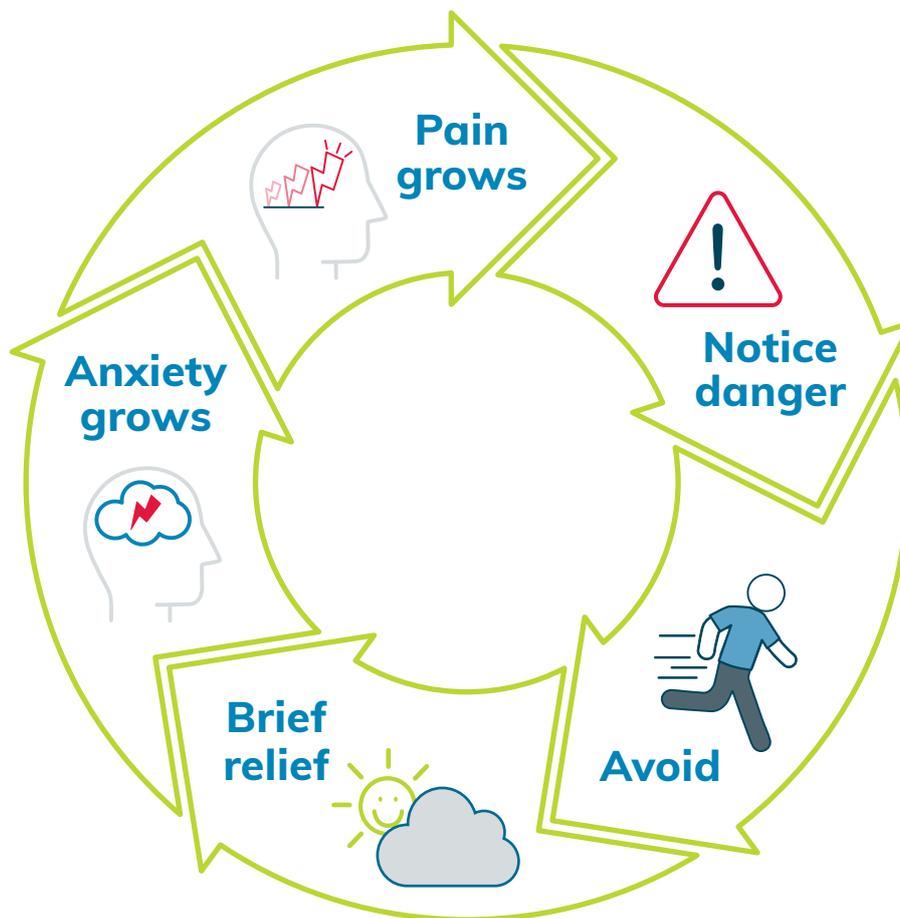




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Pain makes anxiety an even bigger problem. You might try to stop doing activities that you fear will make your pain worse, such as going for a walk, going to the shops or seeing friends. When you start to do less, your confidence reduces over time and your anxiety grows. Also, because you are not as active as you used to be, your body does not have the strength to do the things you want to do, which then makes your pain worse and the cycle continues.

Pain and anxiety cycle





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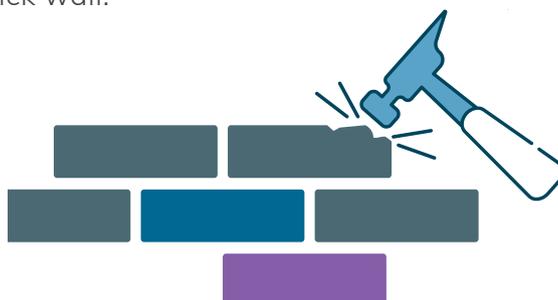
How do you stop this?

You can stop this cycle by building up your activity level slowly over time, starting with something small.

It is like training for a marathon. If you tried to run a marathon without doing any training, what do you think would happen? For most people, it would be too much and they most likely would not finish or injure themselves. So you need to start off small and build up slowly over time. For example, start with a small walk, then build up to running a few kilometres and then add 1 or 2 km each week until you can confidently run the full distance.

Tackling anxiety works in the same way; you do not want to try too much and flood yourself with feelings of anxiety and tension. You want to start small and build up slowly – this means you do things step-by-step (do not dodge them) and keep going. This will help your confidence to grow.

It might feel pointless to start with such small steps but focus on where you want to be and not on where you are now. Remember to be a patient with yourself. Try not to compare what you can do now with what you could do before your injury. Every small bit counts, so keep chipping away at the bricks in your brick wall.



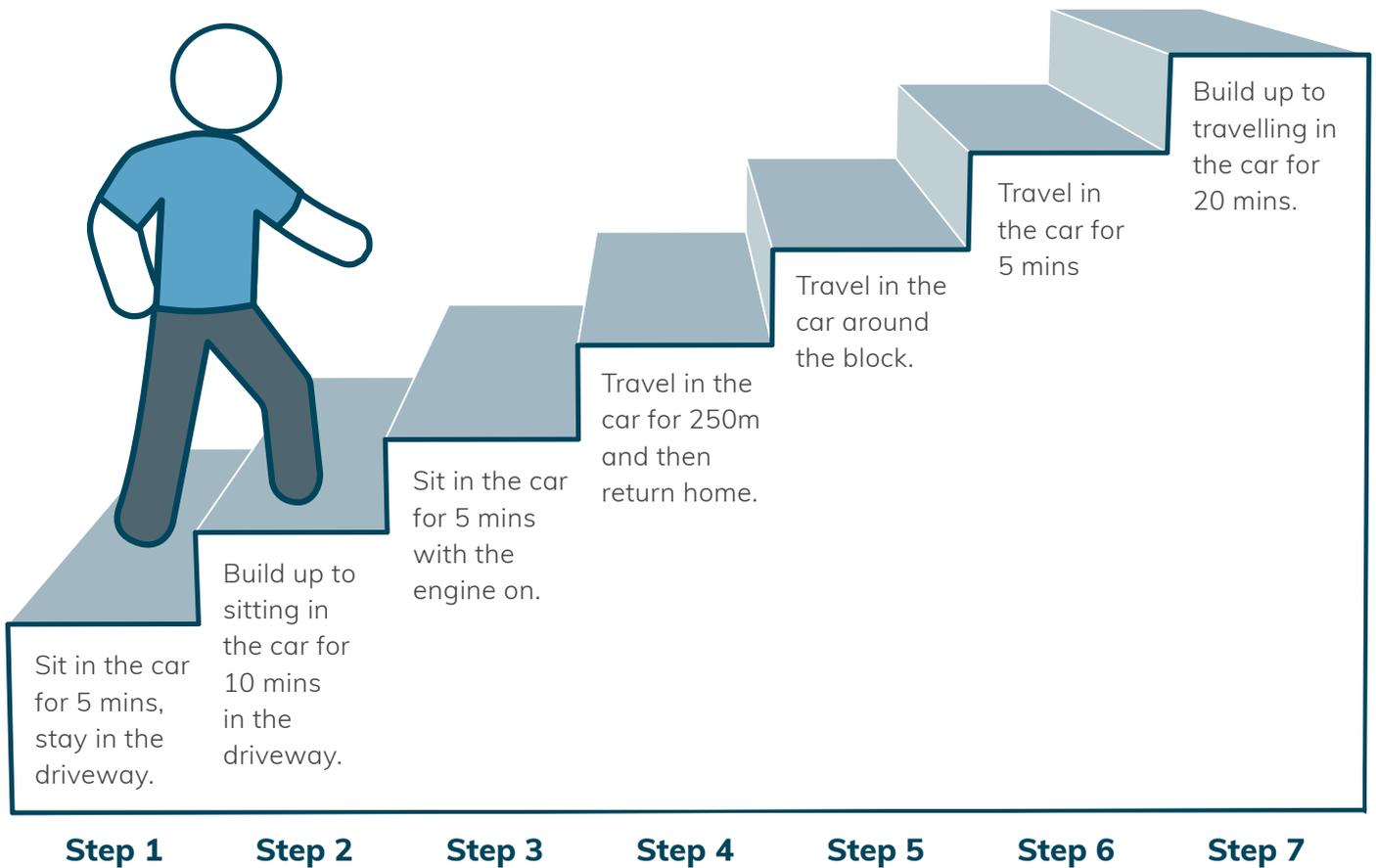
Let's see how this works using an example.

Cody had a bad car accident a few years ago where he had some major injuries, including a brain injury and a broken leg and wrist. He now has chronic pain in his wrist and has not been able to travel in a car without having huge anxiety. This is stopping him from visiting friends and going to important doctor's appointments. Cody is worried that he will have another car accident and whenever he gets into the car his heart starts racing, he breathes fast and he cannot think properly. This almost always makes his wrist pain worse. He knows that it is unlikely that he will have another accident, but he does not feel that he can control his anxiety.

Two weeks ago, he had to go to an important doctor's appointment. By the time he got there, he was shaking and very upset, and his pain was worse. He has not left the house since then and has missed his sister's birthday party. This has really upset Cody so now he wants to work on travelling in the car. These are the steps he worked out with his carer.



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See how Cody started off really small, and with something that he could easily do, then he built up the steps slowly so that he was not flooded by his anxiety.

Some other situations might be:

- seeing old friends
- starting a training course
- going on a holiday.



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Now it is your turn to have a go with something you want to work on.

Write down five things you would like to work on?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Order them from your smallest to biggest fear

1. <input type="text"/>	SMALL
2. <input type="text"/>	
3. <input type="text"/>	MEDIUM
4. <input type="text"/>	
5. <input type="text"/>	BIGGEST

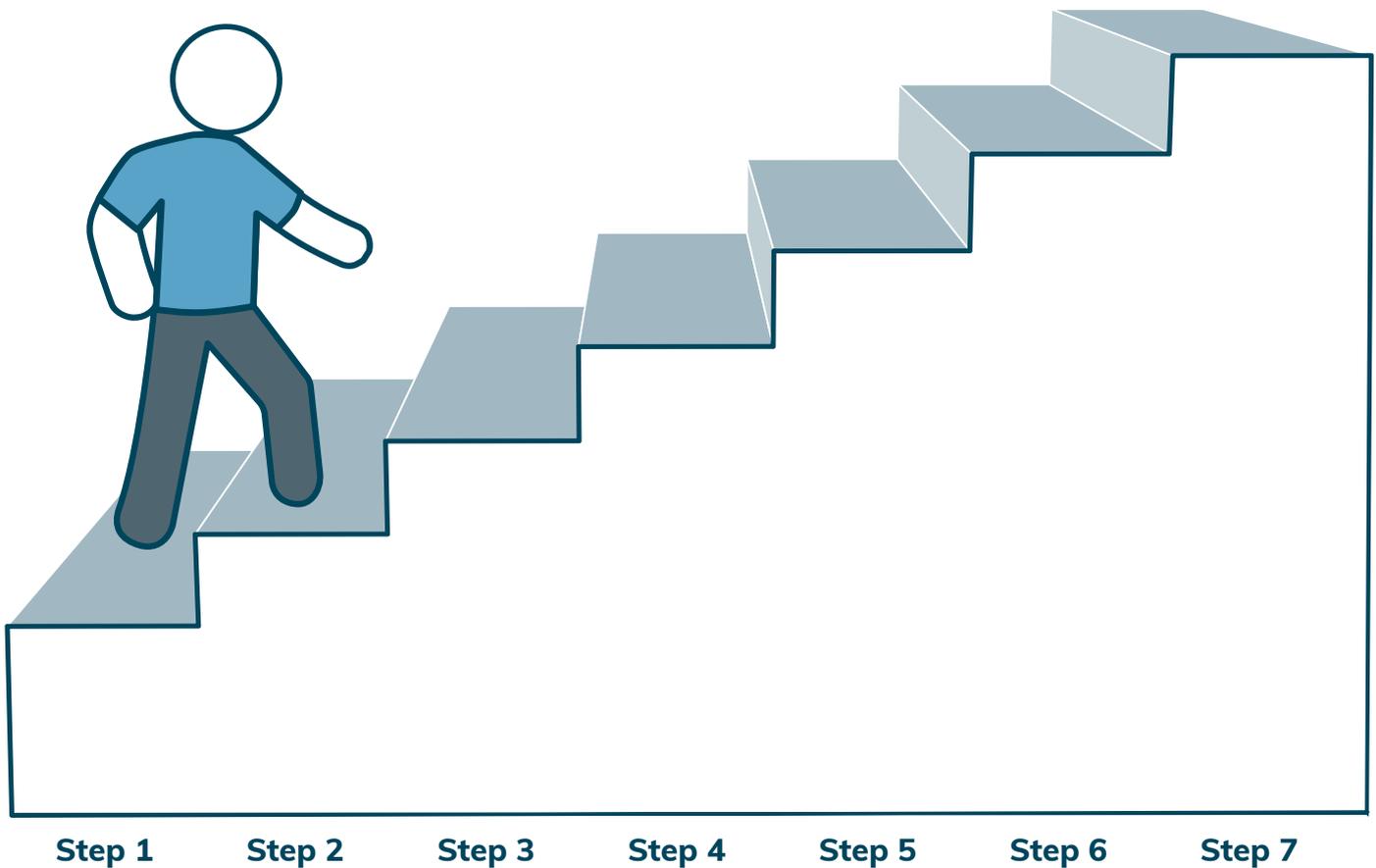




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Now write each step you need to do to overcome this anxiety – remember, keep it small and simple.

My anxiety is:



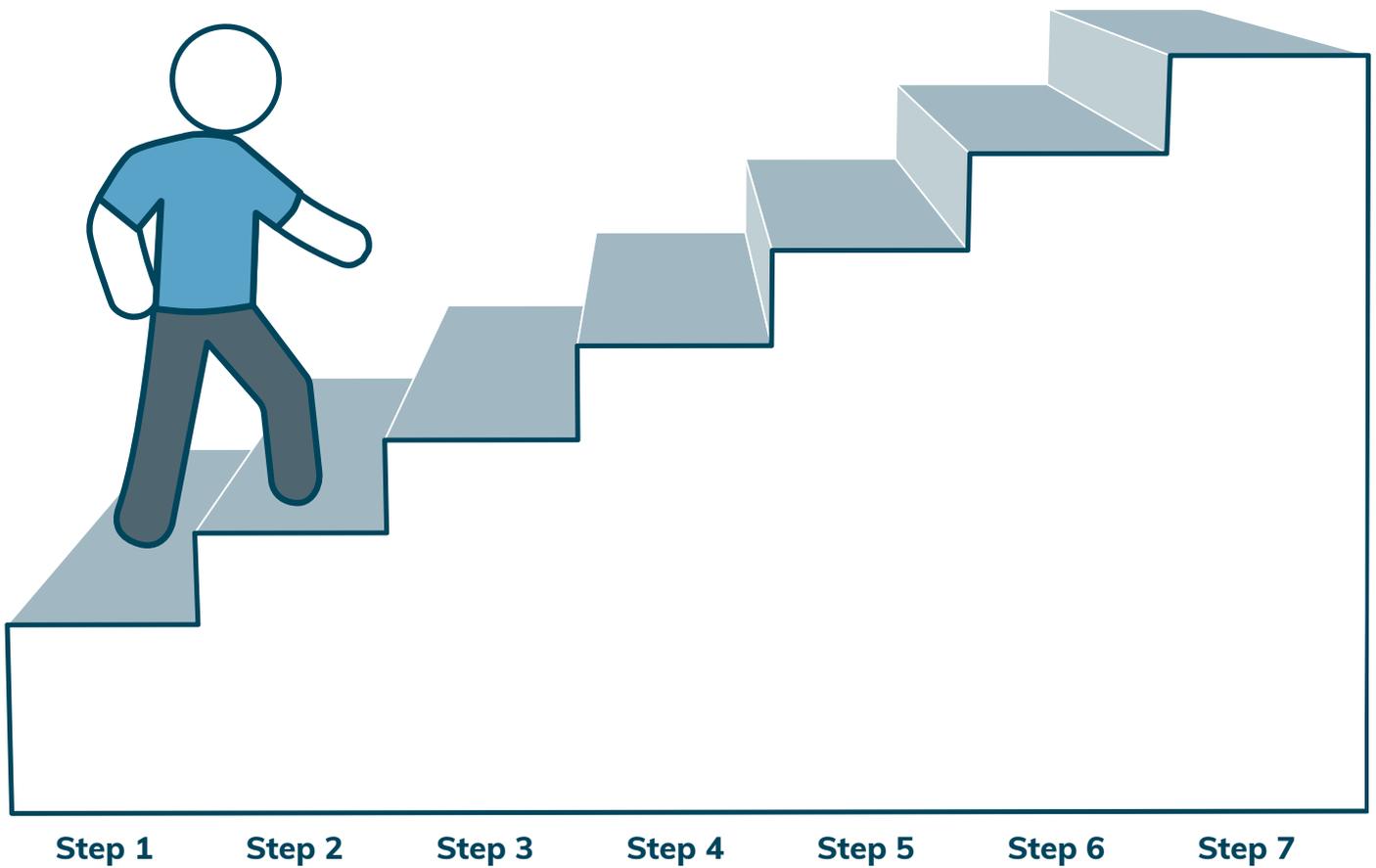
Great! Now you have a plan to manage this problem. Once you are done, think about what did and did not work for you.

Now you can move onto the next item in your list. Use tools that helped you with the last plan and see if you can work around any problems that you think you might see with the new plan.



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My anxiety is:





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Tackling anxiety and the things you fear is not easy, so how are you going to handle this?

What tools are you going to use to help you keep your anxiety in check? List five tools you can use to help your anxiety.

Five tools to manage my anxiety

Some ideas:

1. Practice deep breathing
2. Talk to my family/friends
3. Meditate
4. Ask for help
5. Listen to music

Your list

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Remember, practice makes progress.