



Pain Management Service

Flare-up Planning

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Aim

You may have already have read the other information sheets about understanding chronic pain, pacing, stress and pain and sleep. Hopefully they have helped you develop a better understanding of pain and some techniques to help you to manage it.

The aim of this information sheet is to discuss flare-up management. This will include defining what a flare-up is and how to bring together pain management techniques that are useful during a flare-up. It will also discuss how to create a flare up plan by bringing together all of the techniques discussed throughout the information sheets.

What is a flare-up?

We know that there are times when you have an increase in pain or a 'flare-up'. Flare-ups are generally when you feel your pain is out of control or "off the chart". A flare-up can last for hours, days or weeks. The pain may feel more difficult to cope with and the usual pain management techniques might not feel as effective as they normally do.



It can be frightening to have a flare-up and people can panic and do unhelpful things, such as going to bed for days, taking a lot of medication, ringing the GP constantly or going to A&E.

Flare-ups are often associated with chronic pain. Having a flare-up plan is about minimising the frequency, severity and length of the flare.

Remember that even although a flare-up can be difficult it is not a sign that there is any further damage or that a new injury has occurred. It is important to remember that this is only temporary and that it does not mean that we are going back to the beginning of our health issues.

What causes a flare-up?

People often recognise triggers such as;

- Over activity / pushing through pain
- Other health conditions, illnesses or colds
- Stress
- A period of poor sleep
- Unexpected events and disruptions to routines
- Feeling upset or lower in mood than usual
- Unknown...



You might also notice that before a flare starts that you;

- Have increased stress
- Are more irritable
- Have localised pain
- Feel increased fatigue
- Feel more tense than usual
- Experience shortness of breath and a feeling of panic

Thinking about what you feel before a flare starts can help you identify some triggers and allow you to manage these better. It also means you can get your flare up plan in action early.

During a flare you could experience;

- Worsening pain and fatigue
- Restricted movement and activity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from others and usual activities
- Negative thinking patterns
- Loss of focus, confusion
- Fear, Frustration, Anger, Guilt, Self Judgement, Despair

Flare-up Plan – what can be helpful?

A flare-up plan should help us feel more in control and help the pain to become more manageable. It is important to have a plan ready for when you need it.

You need to work out your own flare-up plan based on those parts of pain management that are most helpful for you.

It is important that plans are flexible and can be adapted as needs change. Remember it is also helpful to involve family and friends in a flare-up plan.

Often when we think of a flare-up plan we can imagine a box of all the helpful things we might need;

- Contacts for support or help with childcare
- Snacks
- Heat or Cold packs
- TENS machine
- Meals in freezer or takeaway menus
- Spare batteries or phone chargers





- Reminders
 - To move regularly
 - To breathe
 - To pace
 - Words of comfort or reassurance
- Soothing, comforting items (music/ scents/ cosy blanket)
- Mindfulness materials
- A box set or book/ magazine
- Extra medication



Making a Flare-up plan

The first thing to try is writing down what you would have in your plan – a ‘first draft’ that you can amend or add to from experience next time you have a flare up. Consider sharing this plan with others and letting them know how they can help you or comfort you during a flare-up.

My Flare-up Plan	What Worked?
<p><i>Childcare numbers</i> <i>Takeaway menus</i> <i>Relaxation app</i> <i>Tai chi video reminder</i> <i>Extra phone charger</i> <i>Spare Hot water bottle</i> <i>Reminder that this will pass</i> <i>Friends phone number</i> <i>Extra Tea bags</i></p>	

Helpful Thoughts

Remember how our thoughts can impact on how we feel and what we do. We will likely be in stress mode when in flare-up; our thoughts may be focussed on what we are finding hard and how awful it is. Watch out for thoughts becoming overly critical, negative or focusing on the worst case scenarios. If this sort of thinking starts to dominate, it can make us feel worse by winding up both our stress and pain systems.

It can be helpful to remind ourselves that we can cope and to talk back to some of the difficult thoughts we might have.

This will pass, I've managed before

What would I tell a friend in this situation?

How can I wind down my 'pain alarm system'?

Pain doesn't always mean more damage

A flare-up is a setback but it doesn't mean I am not coping well

Who can I ask for help?

Following on from a Flare-up

When the flare-up reduces it can help to review our plan and make and changes that could help with future flare-ups.

- reflect on what went well
- what have you learned from the experience that you might want to adjust in your plan
- remember to pace back to activity gradually
- be kind to yourself

