

FLARE UPS

PLAN FOR FLARE UPS

It is usual when living with chronic pain that you will experience fluctuations in the intensity and nature of the discomfort. These flare-ups may occur very suddenly and persist for prolonged periods of time so it is natural that you may feel particularly upset and dispirited, but do not panic. During bouts of intense pain, opioids and other pain medications can seem to be the only solution. However, although these may be beneficial and necessary, it is wise to pinpoint other non-drug based pain control strategies that integrate techniques that you generally find helpful in distracting you from the pain, or helping you to relax and enter a positive frame of mind so you remain in control of the pain.

PREVENTION – PLAN AHEAD

The old adage “prevention is better than cure” is an important notion with managing chronic pain flare-ups.

Pain Triggers: Knowing what situations or activities induce your pain to become more intense is important for managing your condition. However identifying these may not always lead to a satisfactory outcome, since the idea of prevention only works if you are able to control the “triggers” to some extent. E.g. If weather is a ‘trigger’ there is little chance of controlling your flare-up. On the other hand, triggers like “over-activity” or “under-activity” are under your control and so are largely seen as preventable. **Early warning signs:**

Another form of prevention involves identifying the early signs of a pain flare-up coming on, and rather than ignoring the signals or resigning yourself to the inevitability of the situation Use these signs to start doing something to modify its impact i.e. relaxation exercises, develop positive visual images, breathing exercises.

Alternative Coping Strategies: *Take action on the pain* e.g. medication, complementary therapy, keep the body moving so you don’t stiffen up and become sedentary.

Control your breathing: Breathing slowly and deeply will help you to feel more in control of the situation and will keep you relaxed and prevent any muscle tension or anxiety from worsening the pain.

Do things that are achievable: Break larger tasks down into smaller tasks.

Distract yourself: Shift your attention onto something else so the pain is not totally ruling your mind and do things you enjoy doing.

Acknowledge the Pain: Acknowledge that the pain is there, accept what it feels like and where it hurts, however, do not get attached to the negative feelings and thoughts that the pain may represent to you. Remind yourself that things will start to improve and you will therefore not allow it to play a role in anymore suffering which will delay your recovery.

Hold onto the good times: During periods of intense pain, time may seem to drag and everything can seem impossible. Reflect on activities you have done when the pain was less intense. Reassure yourself that in previous flare ups, you have survived and have been able to return to doing those activities.

Look positively at the pain: The pain flare-up may be an indication that you may have exceeded your limitations and pushed yourself too hard. You may feel that the pain is defeating you and there is nothing that you can do to stop it. It will only defeat you if you allow it to isolate you from other people, destroy your relationships with family and friends and make you bitter and angry. During this period of pain look at what positive lessons you can learn, both about preventing it reoccurring again and about how you need to build up and nurture your friendships, relationships and the things that are important to you, so that you continue to enjoy life in spite of the pain.

Have an ‘action plan’ that works for you!!!!!! – Have a list of different ideas and strategies that you have worked out in advance. Know what has worked successfully in the past, however, bear in mind that the same strategy may not work every time. Stay positive, keep socially connected with positive friends and family while working closely with a team of Health Professionals.