



# Pain Management

## DISABILITY SERVICES

## RESOURCE CARD #2

Most people experience pain in their lives, whether this affects them emotionally, or physically, or both. Sometimes feeling physical pain in our bodies can make us feel tired, anxious, stressed, and frustrated.

This can affect our thinking and ability to cope with other things that are going on in our lives. It is especially the case if the pain is ongoing or occurs frequently.

### **Take control – establish a pain management team**

More often than not persistent pain will change you in some way. Experiencing high levels of pain can affect your sleep, appetite, mood and ability to fully participate in life and study. A good step towards taking control of your pain is to establish a pain management team. They can help you understand what is happening, offer a different perspective and suggest prevention and response strategies.

At Victoria your pain management team might include staff from Health, Counselling, Physiotherapy, and Disability Services. External health providers, friends and family may also form an important role in your team. You may wish to give people in your team permission to share information about your needs – it will be easier for them to work as a team if they talk to each other.

### **Set some goals and track your progress**

Once you've established your pain management team you can start identifying your personal goals and strategies for achieving these. Be sure to break them down into workable parts. People in your team may be able to offer goal suggestions; ensure these are realistic and suggest ways they can support you.

Track your progress and identify what solutions work for you by keeping a pain management diary. That is where you record your medicine, exercise, food, sleep, emotions and symptoms and can help you listen to your body. You can then share relevant knowledge with your health professionals to inform their approach and make the most of your time with them.



## Here are some approaches to managing pain you may like to include in your plan:

### Exercise

- + Many people in pain are afraid to exercise, yet exercise is vital to improve muscle tone and encourages the production of endorphins. Endorphins are natural chemicals produced by the body which have a direct influence on the reduction of pain.
- + Obtain professional advice on appropriate exercise from your medical provider. Victoria's Recreation Centre has a variety of group programmes; some of the less strenuous ones include yoga, pilates, and a swiss ball class.

### OOS Busters:

If you experience Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) attend the OOS Busters Programme run by Victoria's Occupational Health Nurse.

### Relaxation

- + Muscle tension, anxiety and pain can exacerbate each other. Relaxation can cause a reduction in heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension.
- + Ways of relaxing may include: meditation, yoga, religion, music, deep breathing exercises, yawning for quick relaxation and humour.

### Diversion

- + Especially useful for acute or short-term pain management.
- + Focus your attention on something other than the sensation of pain.
- + Techniques can include slow breathing exercises.
- + Do things you really enjoy – laughter is a positive distraction.

### Imagery

- + Imagery is the use of one's imagination to control what you are feeling. It can provide distraction and relaxation, which can help reduce pain.
- + Example: pain is a sound which gets quieter, a shape that gets smaller, a vicious animal that becomes friendly or disappears.
- + Other imagery may include the image of breathing out the pain.

### Pacing

- + Take a break before you need it.
- + Recognise your achievements – even if they feel minor they are worth celebrating.

### Stay informed

- + Read positive and encouraging literature on living with pain. There are some excellent introductions to self help and first hand success stories available through the DSS resource library.
- + Stay informed about new research on managing pain.

### If you're not managing

- + Find someone that you can trust to talk it over.
- + Contact counselling services or the free help lines when you feel you can't talk to your personal support network of friends and family.
- + Help-lines include: Youthline, Warmline, Healthline and the Samaritans.
- + Find out from your doctor about local support groups and pain relief services such as pain clinics and pain management programmes.
- + Explain your pain to family and friends to help them understand what you're experiencing.

### Care Plus:

If you have two or more chronic health conditions you may be eligible for the Care Plus programme. Care Plus aims to improve chronic care management and reduce the cost of health services. If you think you may be eligible for Care Plus, ask your doctor or nurse if they will conduct an assessment to determine if you are eligible. If you are not eligible it may be that they can help you in other ways or review your existing care.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This resource was produced by Disability Services at Victoria University of Wellington to provide self-help information and guidance for tertiary students.

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