



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

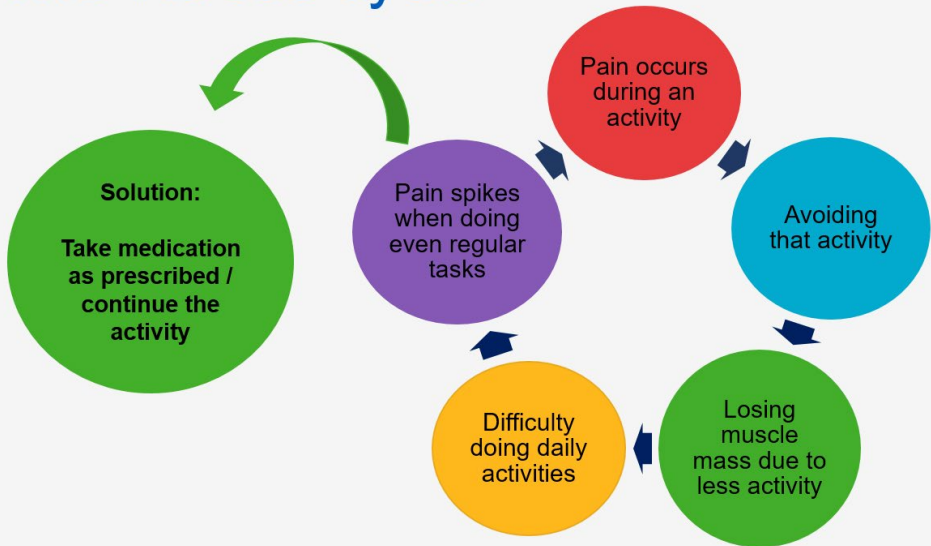
Prehab: Pain management

Information for patients
preparing for an operation or
procedure

Understanding and managing pain: Breaking the cycle

Pain can sometimes create a cycle where we avoid activities because they cause discomfort. Our brain becomes more sensitive to pain and sees it as a sign of danger. While this can sometimes be true, avoiding movement can cause muscles to weaken, making everyday tasks harder and leading to more activity avoidance.

The vicious cycle



The best way to break this cycle is to take your pain medication as prescribed by your surgeon and keep doing activities at a level you can tolerate. Medication helps control pain, making it easier for you to stay active and enjoy your favourite activities.

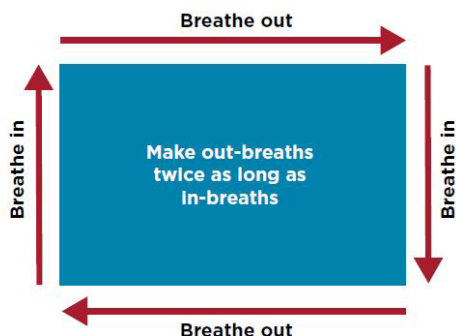
Pain is real, but it doesn't have to control you. Simple methods like taking medication on time, gentle movement or stretching, and mindfulness can help you manage pain better and feel more in control. With patience and consistency, these efforts can lead to long-term improvements.

Three helpful ways to manage pain

1. Relaxation techniques

Relaxing your mind and body reduces stress and tension, which can worsen pain.

- Try rectangle breathing to lower pain intensity and increase tolerance. You can do this for as little as 60 seconds at a time and can be done as many times throughout the day as you want.
- Imagine a rectangle, or if available you can look at one in the room, e.g. a window or TV screen.



- Repeat the exercise until you feel your breathing is under control. As you get used to using this technique, try breathing out for longer than you're breathing in.
- You can do this for as little as 60 seconds at a time and can be done as many times throughout the day as you want.
- Other useful methods include meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and gentle stretches.

2. Staying active

Being active helps prevent and manage many health complications.

- You don't need to do intense exercise; even 5 repetitions of simple movements like knee extensions or arm rotations daily can help.
- Go at your own pace and find activities that suit you.

3. Using pain medication wisely

- Take your medication as prescribed, not just when pain becomes severe.
- Take medication 30-60 minutes before exercise or activities for better relief.
- Regularly review your medication with your surgeon to make sure it is working well.
- Adjust your activity based on pain but try not to stop moving completely.

Understand what pain management technique helps you. Some people have even shared that simple strategies like heat or ice packs, identifying a comfortable position, talking to friends and family, listening to music/podcasts and even focusing on their religious beliefs have helped them manage the pain better.

Talk to the experts

If you think that you are not able to manage the pain effectively on your own and need extra support, talk to the experts.

- **Transitional Pain Service (TPS)** – If you experience chronic pain and the pain is uncontrollable and is affecting your mental health, we can refer you to the TPS in the hospital, based on the condition that you have.
- **Talk to your GP** – If you are concerned about your pain medication, be it the dosage, any side effects or even if the medication has not been effective in managing the pain, talk to your GP. They may be able to provide the best possible solution to you.

Managing flare ups

The nature of chronic pain means that there will be times when you experience increased pain and symptoms for longer than 24 hours. These episodes may be referred to as flare ups, or a setback.

What can cause a flare up?

- Poor pacing/over exertion: Increased or prolonged activity.
- Changes in medication.
- Stress, anxiety or depression: Physical and emotional.
- Other diseases or infections.
- Hormonal changes.
- Weather changes: Sensitivity to cold, damp, humidity, heat.
- No obvious reason.

Identify your triggers

Understanding the “whats”, “wheres” and “whys” of your flare ups is essential. What activities, environments or situations tend to spark your symptoms? Where do you notice flare ups happening most? And why do they occur? Are there patterns related to stress, weather, or physical exertion? Pinpointing these triggers helps you avoid or prepare for them.

Balance activity and rest

A common challenge is the over-activity/rest cycle. On a good day, it's tempting to do more, but pushing too hard often leads to increased pain later. This can force you into extended rest periods, possibly requiring more pain medications and affecting your mood negatively. Finding a sustainable balance keeps flare-ups more manageable and daily life more consistent.

The 3 Ps: PACE, PLAN, PRIORITISE

- **PACE** yourself by spreading out activities and avoiding the urge to overdo it on better days.
- **PLAN** ahead to manage tasks, ensuring you have enough energy for what matters most.
- **PRIORITISE** activities that are most important or beneficial, so you focus your energy wisely and reduce unnecessary strain.

By recognizing triggers, maintaining a balanced activity-rest rhythm, and using the 3 Ps, you can better manage flare ups and improve your overall wellbeing.

Guidelines for flare up management

- Talk to your GP: Seek your GP's advice if you have had an injury or are concerned that you have a new problem.
- Reduce the intensity: Reduce activities but keep mobile, i.e. return to initial baselines (starting goal) for exercise/activities.
- Try to walk a little at intervals: If lying down helps the pain, rest in this position, but practise gentle mobility exercises (e.g. shoulder stretches).
- Keep going: Gradually start to increase activity, working towards simple achievable goals as soon as possible.

Useful resources

1. NHS: 10 Ways to Ease Pain

This NHS guide offers practical, evidence-based tips for managing and reducing everyday pain. It includes advice on physical activity, medication, relaxation techniques, and lifestyle changes to support long-term pain relief. www.nhs.uk/live-well/pain/10-ways-to-ease-pain/

2. Flippin' Pain

Flippin' Pain is a public health campaign aiming to change how people think about, talk about, and treat persistent pain. It provides accessible education and resources based on modern pain science. www.flippinpain.co.uk/

3. Live Well with Pain – Resources for People with Pain

This site offers self-management tools and resources to help people living with persistent pain take control of their health. It includes guides, videos, and downloadable tools for daily life and wellbeing. <https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources-for-people-with-pain/>

4. Pain Concern

Pain Concern is a charity providing information and support for people living with chronic pain. The site features podcasts, leaflets, a helpline, and updates on pain management research and advocacy.

<https://painconcern.org.uk/>

5. Versus Arthritis – Managing Your Pain

Versus Arthritis offers comprehensive information on managing arthritis-related pain. The page includes self-care tips, pain relief options, and guidance on emotional wellbeing and support services.

www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/managing-your-pain/

Contact information

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Prehab Team, October 2025

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