

**1 Learn to relax and reduce your tension:**

When we are in pain it is common to tense up and hold our muscles very rigid, often in an unusual posture to try to protect the painful area. This is called 'muscle guarding'. Unfortunately, far from alleviating pain it usually makes it worse, because it causes tension and discomfort in other parts of the body. Learn a muscle relaxation exercise, and practice slow calm breathing. Identify ways that you relax generally such as having a hot bath, watching T.V, or listening to music.

**2 Keep a Pain diary:** Be a detective and discover the pattern of your pain. Keep a diary and rate your pain on a scale of 1 to 10, identify the situations, and times when the pain increases or decreases. Adapt your daily programme so that the more important things are done when you hurt less.

**3 Challenge your negative thoughts:** Write down your negative thoughts such as, 'I feel awful', 'I can't cope', and 'This pain is getting worse', then draw up a list of positive challenges such as, 'I am going to get on top of this', 'If I relax and distract myself it will improve'. Write down these challenging thoughts on the back of a postcard, and read them when you feel bad. Be aware of the tendency to 'catastrophise' and think in 'all or nothing' terms.

**4 Distract yourself from the pain:** As a rule if you focus on the pain it makes it worse. Distract yourself with interesting activity, enjoyable company, or an absorbing television programme. You will notice the pain less. Plan your day so that you have less time to focus on the pain.

**5 Use a visualisation technique:** Some people can visualise their pain in a way that helps to control it. One man visualised the pain in his back as being, 'like a number of hot bars of an electric fire'. To control his pain he

imagined switching each bar off, one by one, and visualised the glowing orange colour fading to a dull grey colour. Another technique involves building up a scene in your mind of a relaxing pain free situation such as a warm beach or a deep wood. If you can visualise yourself in that place using this form of guided imagery you can take yourself away from the pain.

**6 Pace yourself – avoid the all or nothing approach:** Often people will either do too much or too little. If they feel well they might try to do all the things that they hadn't done when they felt bad, this might mean starting the day in a flurry of activity, then having to retreat to bed. This is not helpful. The ideas of pacing are: a) Take regular rests and enjoy breaks rather than waiting until you need them. b) Increase activity in a gradual stepwise progression – little and often.

**7 Set realistic goals:** Look to the future and decide what you would like to achieve. Write down a number of specific goals for the short medium and long term. Then break these goals down into specific activities needed to achieve these goals. Set yourself targets for each day, even if this is something like walking the dog for 10 minutes or preparing the vegetables.

**8 Recognise the important effect of family and friends:** Although it is difficult to advise those around you not to react to 'wincing', 'moans', and other pain behaviour, as although it is an opportunity to show they care, it acts to reinforce the pain and make it worse. Ask them to try and ignore the pain behaviour and instead give praise and encouragement for effort and achievement. Ask them not to do things for you unless absolutely necessary as an overprotective carer can diminish your independence, which will ultimately mean that you have more time to focus on the pain.