



Anaesthesia, Surgery
and Critical Care

North Bristol **NHS**
NHS Trust

The Pain Management Programme: Flare-ups



Exceptional healthcare, personally delivered

Flare-ups

During the course of the BackPack Programme you will be taught ways of preventing and managing pain flare-ups.

Most people who suffer persistent back trouble will experience flare-ups in different ways. Different things will provoke them, they will feel different and last for varying periods of time. Each person will have different ways of dealing with a flare-up. The purpose of this handout is to encourage you to become aware of those things that provoke a flare-up for you, and to develop a plan for coping with a flare-up when it happens.

What provokes a flare-up for you?

Here are some ideas generated by pain sufferers. Which one(s) apply to you?

Overdoing it

This may be the result of taking on too much, or simply as a result of doing one activity for too long. Flare-ups can be started if you fail to **pace** yourself properly, or if you fail to **plan, prepare** and **prioritise**. Overdoing it does not simply refer to activities, but to periods of inactivity such as sitting or lying.

Tackling an awkward task

A flare-up may be generated following an awkward movement such as twisting suddenly or lifting badly. Remember to **position** yourself and **plan** your actions.

Stress

A period of stress in your life may provoke a flare-up. Be aware of those things that upset you and spot the signs that you are becoming unduly stressed.

Withdrawing medication too rapidly

Although medication has limited effectiveness, for many people, stopping medication too quickly may cause a flare-up. If you intend to reduce a medication which has been prescribed by your doctor, stick to the advice about how to do this.

Periods of illness

Following a bout of illness, you may be more prone to a flareup because of your loss of fitness, the need to rest and inability to continue with your exercises. Remember to restart stretches and exercises gradually by **pacing** yourself.

Weather

Some people say that their pain is made worse by changes in the weather. Be aware that this is a vulnerable time for you and be extra careful to **pace** yourself, and plan appropriate activities.

Not all these factors apply to everyone. It is worth recognising as many signs and characteristics from your own experience of flare-ups to help you next time. Use the space below to list those warning signs which you have noticed before, and add any new ones as you become aware of them.

My warning signs:

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Flare-ups (2)

Even with the best of planning, it may be impossible to avoid a flare-up. If you do have a flare-up use it as a way to learn. Did you ignore the signs? What could you have done differently? An important part of learning to manage your pain is learning to manage flare-ups as best you can. During the programme we have discussed a number of ideas for managing a flare-up, and here are some reminders:

Relaxation - remember the vicious circle of pain and tension? Try to use your favourite relaxation technique.

Exercise - It's tempting to stop completely when you hurt - don't - remember what you have been told and don't forget the stretches.

Distraction - This can be in a variety of ways - e.g. reading, listening to music, a jig-saw.

Socialising - If you're hurting badly, it's easy to feel like isolating yourself. Remember being in touch with someone can be helpful, so what about giving someone a ring, or arranging a visitor.

Pamper yourself - If the going is tough, pace yourself and give yourself a break. If a massage or relaxing shower or bath helps, why not? Decide now how you will indulge yourself as a kind of compensation next time a flare-up occurs.

Medication - Using medication appropriately may help, but remember plan carefully. You may temporarily step up your painkillers, but don't forget to reduce them in a planned way.

Spot the unhelpful thinking - Remember the way we think influences how we feel. In the midst of a flare-up it is easy to slip into bad habits and dwell on the negatives. Try to be aware of this, and try out different ways of thinking - flare-ups do not go on for ever!

Not all these strategies will apply to you, and you may have developed some additional ideas for successfully managing or reducing the length of a flare-up. Use the space below and write down those ideas that you have for managing your own flare-up, and add any new ones that you are aware help.

My flare-up plan:

.....

Finally, dealing with a flare-up can be demanding. Don't forget to REWARD yourself with a treat once you've coped successfully. It need not be expensive or time consuming. Spend some effort thinking of your own reward(s) and write a list here.

My rewards:

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**PATIENT
APPROVED** 

How to contact us:

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If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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