

# The Persistent Pain Service

We aim to put you in control of your own healthcare and deliver care that is tailored to your needs.

## Who is this Leaflet for?

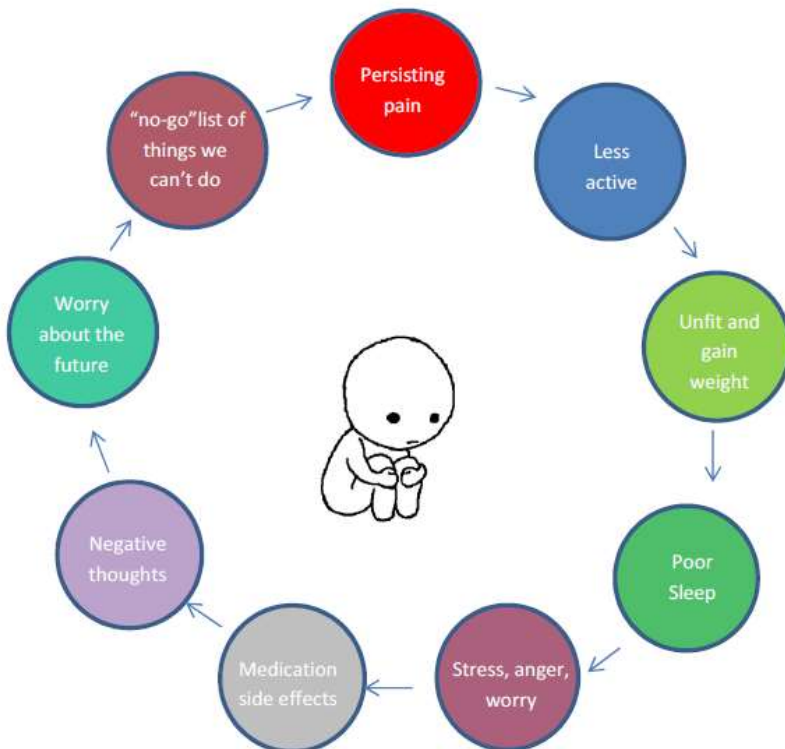
Pain can have a huge impact on our lives; from how we move to our mood and sleep. Frustratingly, pain can affect what matters most to us in life; from our relationships with family and friends, to our ability to work or take part in hobbies. *“Being in pain is exhausting; it wears you down no matter how much you try to stay cheerful.”*

If you are experiencing persisting pain, ask yourself:

1. Do you **understand** your pain
2. Do you feel you are in **control** of your pain?
3. Does your pain stop you from doing the things that are **important** to you in your life?

If you relate to **any** of these questions, then this leaflet may be of help to you.

## How Does Pain Affect you?



When it comes to living with persisting pain patients tell us that it's not just the pain that's the problem, but also how pain can affect your everyday life.

Seeing lots of people trying to find something that helps and getting nowhere can be frustrating and tiring. Often we can feel like we are stuck going round and around in a pain cycle.

The challenge for both you and those treating you is to **understand** your pain and work **together** to find the best way to **manage** it and break the pain cycle.

## How Can the Persistent Pain Service Help You?

Our Pain Team is made up of Doctors, Physiotherapists, Nurses, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists and Pharmacists all specialising in pain. We understand that there is not a “one size fits all” approach when it comes to pain. Together as a team our aim is to put you in control and deliver care tailored to your needs.

- **Focus on what matters to you:** Pain makes life tough. We often give up or struggle with the things that are important to us. Working together through goal setting and utilising your local services, the Pain Team can support you to make meaningful changes to your life.
- **Understand your pain:** How can we cope with something we do not understand? Pain demands an explanation. Our Pain Team can work with you to help you understand your pain experience and how it impacts on your life. Occasionally this may include tests and scans, but for most they are not necessary and can often raise more questions than answers.
- **Take back control:** Living with pain can be like being an unwilling passenger in a speeding car, feeling out of control can be frightening. We would like to help you take back the ‘wheel’. This may include relaxation, physiotherapy, exercises, talking therapies and Pain Management Programmes. Sometimes medications or injections may be useful.

## Understanding Pain

Sometimes pain is easy to understand, like falling over and scraping a knee, or touching something hot and burning ourselves. The pain makes sense. We can see the cut or burn and the unpleasant sensations we feel act like a warning that something is wrong with our body. This is very helpful. You need to know about the cut or burn so that we can look after it until it heals.

Other times we may not be able to see the cause of the pain but this does not mean it is not real (for example, abdominal pain with appendicitis). Again pain is useful as it alerts us that something may not be right and we may decide to see our doctor for help and advice.

Whilst unpleasant these types of pain are useful and are known as **acute pain**.

Acute pain is like an alarm going off. It acts as a useful warning that there may be something wrong. It motivates us to protect our body or seek help and usually it will go as we heal and recover.

## The Nerves and the Brain

The nerves and brain play an important role in all pain experiences. Sometimes our warning system becomes overly sensitive, like burnt toast setting off a fire alarm.

When the alarm goes off we commonly rest and protect. However, over time being less active caused our body to become less fit meaning we struggle to do the things that are important.

Pain can be stressful, it can impact how we think and feel emotionally. What we know if that how we think and feel and cope with stress will make our warning system more sensitive.

Poor sleep can make us feel tired, less motivated and irritable. This can make us less able to cope with life stresses and impact on our pain.

Pain isn't always in one place. For some people it can feel like the pain is all over and can move from one place to another.

## Why Does my Pain Continue?

Most of us grow up understanding that as the body gets better the pain will go away. So how can we make sense of pain that doesn't go, a pain that becomes persistent?

**First we need to understand why things hurt.**

It can be useful to think about how we experience pain in 3 parts:

- **Part 1: The Danger Sensors in our body.**

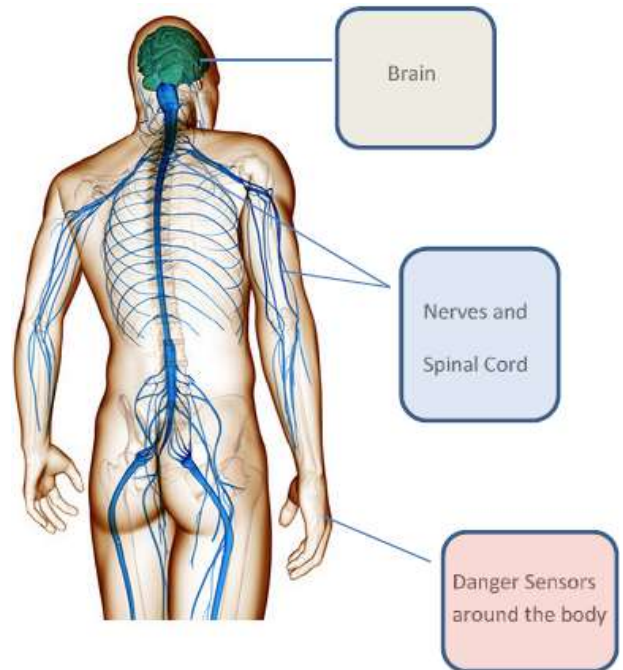
We are made of lots of different parts; bones, muscles, joints, skin, organs, to mention some. Most body parts have different types of danger sensors. A bit like a fire alarm detects smoke if there is a fire, we have sensors that detect inflammation if we are injured. We also have other sensors that tell us if we touch something hot, sharp, or pressure.

- **Part 2: The Nerves and Spinal Cord – Our wiring system.**

Our nerves carry the messages detected by the sensors from the body to the spinal cord. Like passing the baton in a relay team, the message is passed from the nerve to the spinal cord where it travels to the brain.

- **Part 3: The Brain.**

As the messages arrive the brain has to try and figure out what to make of the situation and what should be done. If the brain thinks the message means danger it will pay more attention and sound the alarm for making us hurt. Emotions like stress or low mood also play a part in how loud the alarm rings and why pain is such a personal experience.



*The journey of messages from the sensors in the body to the brain are automatic. The decisions made in the brain are subconscious. The body and its sensors, the nerves and spinal cord, and the process of information in the brain all play a part in how we experience pain.*

We are all familiar with acute pain and so naturally we might focus on the different parts that make up the body for an answer, **but that's only part of the story**. To understand why pain persists **we need to consider the whole of the warning system**, including the nerves and the brain.

*Pain is never "just in the body", it is a complicated mixture of signals from the body and how the brain interprets them.*

## The Body

*"Is there an issue with our tissues?"*

Most things in the body heal as well as they can after 3-6 months, so with persistent pain that may have been present for many months or years it is much more difficult to find a specific cause. Rarely there may be a specific treatment for your pain, such as injections or medications. More commonly specialist tests often reassure us that there is nothing worryingly wrong with the body, but often do not tell us why we are in pain. This can feel frustrating but does not mean that the pain is not real, simply that there is more to the story.