



# Ten Footsteps to Living Well with Pain

A guide to pain self-management for people  
who live with persistent pain



# Welcome to Ten Footsteps – and congratulations on taking the first step towards living well with pain!

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who live with persistent pain

Produced by *Live Well with Pain*, a partnership of pain  
specialists and people with lived experience of pain.

*Live Well with Pain* produces a range of trusted  
self-management tools and resources for people with pain  
and the healthcare professionals who support them.

All resources are available free online at  
[livewellwithpain.co.uk](http://livewellwithpain.co.uk)

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**“I used to feel defeated by my pain. It completely  
controlled my life. But the skills I’ve learned  
through the Ten Footsteps programme mean I  
can actually start to enjoy life again. Thank you  
Live Well with Pain!”**

*Feedback from a person using the Live Well with  
Pain website*

**“Live Well with Pain is such a useful resource –  
I share it with patients every day!”**  
*GP, Tyneside*

## Why Ten Footsteps?

Ten Footsteps has been created by a  
partnership of pain management  
practitioners and people who live with  
persistent pain.

They know from experience that the key  
to living well despite persistent pain is  
*self-management*.

When people self-manage their pain, their  
quality of life and health improves.  
Eventually it stops dominating their day  
and they begin to get more out of life.

Knowing how to manage your pain is not  
automatic – but it is something that you  
can learn.

That’s where Ten Footsteps comes in.  
It’s designed to help you learn the skills  
you need to become an active and  
confident self-manager of your pain.

## How it works

Ten Footsteps is divided into sections.  
We’ve called each section a ‘footstep’

because learning to self-manage is a bit  
like setting out on a journey. Each footstep  
is a stage on the way to becoming a  
confident self-manager of your pain.

## Getting the support you need

Lots of people living with persistent pain  
find it helps to have someone supporting  
them on their self-management journey.

Maybe you have joined a pain management  
course or are part of a peer support group.  
Or perhaps you’re learning to self-manage  
with the help of a healthcare practitioner.  
Whatever way you are learning to self-  
manage your pain, we hope this simple  
guide will help your steps on the journey.

## Take the first footstep

What better way to start than finding  
out a bit about how persistent pain  
actually happens.

So let’s take the first footstep and learn a  
bit about *Pain and the Brain* . . .

# Footstep 1

## Pain and the brain

Persistent pain is very different from the kind of pain you experience when you touch something hot or injure yourself. It goes on long after the original cause. Sensations can feel like the original injury or damage, so it feels as though the damage has not healed, when it actually has. It's like a radio switched on permanently with the volume turned up.



### Persistent pain can cause a range of problems, including:

- **Excitable nerves** – slight pressure around the painful area can cause unpleasant pains and sensations like pins and needles or electric shocks.
- **Sensitivity** – skin, muscles or nerves can be more sensitive to pressure, stretch, touch and /or heat.
- **Faulty brain pain control** – the systems that turn down pain don't work reliably.
- **Low mood** – living with persistent pain can cause strong feelings like anger, frustration, depression and often worry and anxiety too.

### So what can you do to reduce persistent pain?

To reduce your pain, you need to help your brain to turn the pain down. This means 'retraining your brain.' It can come as a bit of surprise to realise that this can actually be done.

You can retrain the brain by getting more active, balancing your activities and focusing more on your goals.

Over time as you become more active and engage in life, your brain will become less overprotective and your pain more manageable.

The rest of the Footsteps in this booklet will show you more about how to do this.

But first, let's find out a bit more about how pain and the brain are connected...

## Pain and the brain - how it really works

Pain is one of our protective systems. It is designed to keep us safe and well, and it's controlled by the brain.

Our brain decides when to protect us based on information it receives from:

1. areas of the body, and
2. many other factors it gathers from elsewhere

It assesses the current situation based on *both* these types of information.

If the brain decides it needs to protect, pain will happen.

In persistent pain, *even though the original trigger for the pain may have stopped*, the other factors are still there, so the brain becomes over-protective and keeps the pain going.

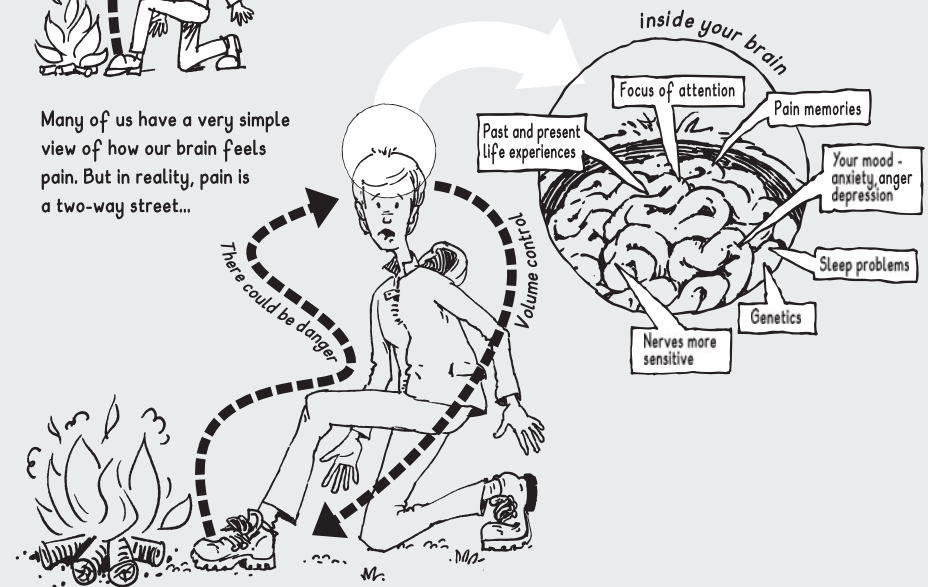
It's a bit like the brain struggling to turn down the volume control on a radio or TV.

### How we might think pain works



Many of us have a very simple view of how our brain feels pain. But in reality, pain is a two-way street...

### How it REALLY works



# Footstep 2

## Acceptance

Accepting persistent pain as part of your everyday life is a huge help. Rather than struggling to avoid or reduce your pain, you can learn to observe, understand and accept it. This is not easy – it can be hard to accept that you are not the person you were. However, as you accept things have changed, you can switch your energy and focus to living well.



'It took me a long time to understand that acceptance isn't the same as giving up. Instead I've come to see it as a conscious decision to completely engage with life, including pain.'

*Person living with persistent pain*

### What does acceptance mean?

Acceptance is not the same as giving up or 'burying your head in the sand.'

It's about being honest and objective with yourself about the reality of your current situation. Even though things may have not worked out as you would have liked – you can still begin to look at your thoughts, feelings and the future in a different, more helpful way.

### Why is acceptance important?

Many people with persistent pain spend years looking for a medical explanation and for someone to get rid of their pain. This can lead to feeling frustrated and stressed. It's normal to feel like this, because our human brains tend to focus on trying to fix a problem rather than looking for ways to live with it.

Sadly most persistent pain can't be cured or fixed. We now understand a lot more about pain, and that to remove persistent pain permanently is an impossible task.

Often people find that when they focus on trying to solve their pain, their pain systems actually become more sensitive – and the pain becomes worse.

This doesn't mean that things can't change or improve.

### Skills to help you on your journey towards acceptance

Many people have found that learning different ways of thinking helps them become more accepting of their pain.

To help you explore this further and learn some skills, we have put together some ideas to help you on your journey towards acceptance . . .

## Three activities for acceptance

To help you explore the idea of acceptance, and learn some skills along the way, here are some activities you can do . . .

### 1. Focus on what you can change

Changing your outlook on yourself and your future takes both time and being 'willing to let go'.

Many people with pain have been on long journeys to try and answer the 'why pain' question which can never be answered. Instead, try to focus on the things you *can* change.

### 2. Think about opportunities

Think about the opportunities that you have had, or could have, since experiencing chronic pain. If it's difficult to do this alone, try talking it through with someone else.

Write down five new opportunities that have come about since you had chronic

pain. Remember that they don't have to be big things – anything counts.

### 3. Using mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique that a lot of people with persistent pain find useful and effective. It is about the kind of awareness that you bring to bring to a situation in the present moment.

It means being in control of what you pay attention to, and for how long.

Practising mindfulness can be a helpful way of managing distress, reducing anxiety and other mood or body symptoms. Many people have learnt to manage their pain with more success by using mindfulness regularly.

Find out more in Footstep 5.

# Footstep 3

## Pacing



People living with persistent pain find that *pacing* is one of the key everyday skills to learn and use. Pacing can help you achieve your goals without increasing your pain or letting tiredness force you to stop. As you'll see, pacing is like the story of the hare and the tortoise: slow and steady wins the race . . .

### Good pacing or bad pacing?

Whether we know it or not, we all do some kind of pacing – it just might not be the best kind for us. Generally speaking, there are three unhelpful styles that people with persistent pain often use:

#### Overactive pacing

This means doing too much activity or too many tasks over a short space of time.

Typically, this happens if you are having a good day: you try to do too much and end up with more pain and tiredness. This means you miss out on enjoyable things because you have to take time out to recover.

#### Underactive pacing

Underactive pacing means that you are doing too little activity to help keep up your strength, stamina and flexibility in

your muscles, ligaments, joints and bones. Most of your time is spent resting, sitting or lying down, which is understandable, especially as lack of fitness makes muscles and other tissues tight, weak and painful.

However, this can actually add to your pain, so over time you end up doing less and less because of the pain.

#### 'Boom and bust' pacing

Often people use pain and energy levels as a guide to their activities and pacing them. This means they risk doing too much activity on good days (overactive), which makes their pain worse. They are then forced to rest while the pain settles down (underactive).

This is a mixed style of pacing, which is unhelpful in the long term. It's sometimes known as 'boom and bust'.



### Learning to pace well

Pacing involves regulating your daily activity so as not to flare-up your pain. Pacing skills allow you to gradually increase what you are able to do so you become more active, fitter, healthier and happier.

### How to pace well

**1. Decide which activities you need to pace. If any daily activities are difficult because of your pain or they cause your pain to increase, they probably need to be paced.**

**2. Work out how much effort to put into each activity without causing more pain. Reduce your activity so that you stop or take a rest long before you would usually experience pain. Then, steadily build up your body stamina by increasing what you do before each break.**

**3. Be aware of how your body feels in the moment. If you are feeling tired or stiff or have a bit more pain than usual, listen to your body and adjust what you do.**

Find the balance of activity and rest breaks so if your body is feeling stiffer, more tired or pain than usual, you can adjust the balance. This means you take more breaks, use less effort or go more slowly or change to an easier activity at that time.

# Footstep 4

## Setting goals



Having goals is a helpful way of noticing and recording the progress you make over time. Sometimes though, for people with persistent pain, reaching your goals may be so challenging that it doesn't even seem worth trying.

Achieving your goals may take longer and require more planning. However, this doesn't mean it's impossible. This is where *goal setting* comes in ...

People living with persistent pain find that they are more likely to reach their goals once they have developed the skill of goal setting.

You can set goals for any area of your life. For example, you might want to be more physically active, so you could set yourself a goal to swim two lengths of the local pool twice a week, to be achieved over a three month period.

You may want to be less reliant on medicines to manage your pain, so you could set a goal with your GP or pharmacist to reduce them over a period of time.

Or you may want to socialise more, in which case you might set a goal of having a family meal out, going and listening to a band, or a half-day shopping trip to the shopping centre with friends, once a month.

### Be SMART with your goal setting

When you set goals, you need to think about how you will achieve them.

When it comes to goal setting, one of the surest ways of getting there is by learning how to create SMART goals ...

## SMART goal setting

SMART goal setting is a way of setting goals so that you have the best chance of achieving them. To understand this, let's start by imagining some typical goals that a person might have. Meet Freda...



1. Rely less on a walking stick when I go out for a walk
2. Get back to gardening
3. Slowly stop taking pain medicines

### Freda's goals

Take a look at Freda's goals. They are a good start, but they're a bit vague. Can she even be sure when she's reached them?

This is where SMART comes in. SMART is way of focusing your goals to make sure they are:

**Specific** – setting out exactly what will be achieved

**Measurable** – how often will you do it, or for how long

**Achievable** – ensuring your goal is realistic for you at the moment

**Rewarding** – you're more likely to get there if your goal is enjoyable

**Timed** – planning how much time is needed to achieve the goal

If you apply these SMART rules to your goals, you'll be far more likely to achieve them!

### Freda's SMART goals

So, applying the rules described above, here's what Freda's goals look like now she's made them SMART.

As you can see Freda now has some clear actions to take. They are *specific* so Freda has guidance on what she's planning to do and she can *measure* when she's done them.

Freda has also made sure they are realistically *achievable* for her at the moment. She also knows they are things she wants to do – so achieving them will be *rewarding*.

And they're *timed* because there's a defined time by which Freda aims to achieve them – SMART!



By the end of four weeks I will:

Go to the shops without using my stick at least three times a week

Find my old box of seeds, choose some herbs and plant them in the kitchen window box

Talk to my GP about how to phase out my pain meds and get a plan in place to do this



# Footstep 5

## Relaxation and mindfulness

Relaxation and mindfulness can help people with persistent pain. For example, we know it can lessen pain levels, reduce stress and improve concentration. So let's look at how you can make a positive difference to your life and your pain by learning how to unwind your body and your mind . . .



### What is relaxation?

Relaxation happens when you or someone else guides your mind to unwind the tension and tightness within your body.

Relaxation often involves using breathing skills and focusing the mind on relaxing images, colours or experiences.

Gentle tightening or stretching and relaxing movements with focus on the breath can also help to lessen the tension within the muscles and body.

Most people who have struggled with pain say that it is so important to learn relaxation. It helps to do it with support and keep doing it on good and bad days.

### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being aware of your body and mind in the "now". It is about noticing what you think, feel or want at this moment without judging yourself.

Mindfulness is about exploring with all your senses: taste, touch, sound, sight and smell. It helps the brain to work better in many different ways, like improving memory or helping with attention so you focus and concentrate better. It can help you sleep better too.

Mindfulness practice helps to reduce stress hormones and so lessen moods like anxiety, depression and anger, along with the thoughts that are tied in with them.

## Here are three different types of relaxation that you can practise:

### 1. Breathing and muscle relaxation

This includes techniques such as

- Belly breathing (also called diaphragmatic breathing)
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- On the spot reduction anxiety or anger reduction (OTSAR)

### 2. Refocusing your attention

You can do this by shifting your attention away from your pain using visualisation techniques.

Imagining a pleasurable activity like a walk along a beach can help shift

your focus away from pain and other unpleasant feelings.

### 3. Time-out relaxation

- Listen to a relaxation recording – there are lots of free relaxations recordings available online, or you can use a relaxation app.
- Lie down on a bed or mat, or sit in your most comfortable chair. Try to find a time when you are unlikely to be disturbed.
- Try and look at your relaxation sessions as part of your self care in the same way as a daily activity programme.

## Learning mindfulness

There are lots of ways to learn. It just depends on how you learn best:

- Get support from a friend or help from a mindfulness trainer.
- Access an internet course, read a guide book or work with a CD or app.
- Join a local relaxation class or mindfulness meditation course and practice at home.

- There are also mindfulness movement courses that link breathing and movement together and are very helpful for stiff and tight muscles and bodies.

**You could also get support from a pain specialist physiotherapist, a talking therapist or a mindfulness teacher who can guide your relaxation and mindfulness skills.**

# Footstep 6

## Sleep



If you're living with pain and struggling with sleep then you're not alone. It's very common for people with persistent pain to have difficulties getting to sleep or staying asleep. Research shows that by adjusting what you do during the day, as well as night, it is possible to achieve a healthier sleep pattern . . .

### Why can't I sleep?

It's likely that there are a number of causes of your sleep difficulties. Here are some common triggers experienced by people living with persistent pain:

- **Living with pain causes fatigue, making you drowsy during the day**
- **Your pain medicines make you drowsy in the daytime so you sleep at irregular times**
- **You worry about how your lack of sleep will affect you the next day**
- **You're not in a regular routine so your mind and body are confused about when it's time to rest**
- **You're not comfortable in your bed or you are disturbed by sounds or light**

- **You are experiencing mood changes that create tension in your body**
- **You notice your pain more as there are no distractions at night**

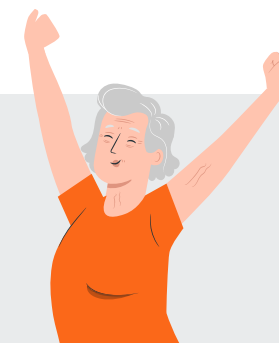
It's very common for people to find that poor sleep makes their pain seem worse. They can find themselves in a vicious cycle where pain makes sleeping difficult, and poor sleep worsens pain.

The really good news is that there are lots of changes you can make to help you to sleep well.

We've put together the top five changes you can make. Over a period of five to six weeks these can make a huge difference . . .

## Five changes for better sleep

Here are the five areas that people living with pain have found to be most helpful:



### 1. Your daily routines

- Get into a regular routine
- Avoid napping
- Avoid using your bedroom to rest in the daytime

### 2. Your activity levels

- Learn the skill of pacing
- Do physical activities you enjoy
- Try to do some activities outside
- Avoid energetic activities shortly before sleep

### 3. Your food and drink choices

- Avoid caffeine in the evening
- Try not to drink too much just before you go to bed
- Avoid drinking alcohol late in the evening
- Eat your main meal earlier in the evening and have a small snack just before you go to bed
- If you are awake in the night, avoid snacking

### 4. Your night-time routines

- Follow a wind-down routine every evening
- Only go to your room when it's time to sleep
- Get the temperature right
- Make sure your room is dark

### 5. Helping your mind and body to rest

- Make sure you have a bed that's comfortable for you
- Find a comfortable position
- Use relaxation techniques
- Avoid checking the time during the night

### And finally, if you wake up in the night – don't struggle

It's very common to feel frustrated or worried if you wake up in the night. Different techniques can help with this. Some people use relaxation techniques, other people find it helps to get out of bed for 15–20 minutes and do something calming in a different room. It can also help to simply lie in bed and accept that 'sleep will come when it's ready.'



# Footstep 7

## Communication

You can't see pain, so how can other people understand what you're dealing with? People living with pain know that talking to those around them can be a challenge. So we need to find ways to say what we need and why.



### Explaining your experience

What do other people need to know about you living with pain? It can help to let people know how the pain limits you. Other people can't see the invisible effects of pain. So talk to them about ways they can support you achieve your goals or help you with learning skills such as pacing.

Some people find it useful to make a list of things they need people to know about what it's like living with persistent pain. Try making different lists for: people you're close to; friends and work colleagues; your employer; health care professionals.

Most people don't know what it's like to live with persistent pain. So we need to find ways to tell them what we need and why. Otherwise they'll have to guess – and will probably get it wrong!

### Be confident and assertive

Often we back out of being assertive, because we don't want to appear pushy or demanding. But assertiveness really just means being clear.

### Manage your stress

Being assertive can be stressful. See *Footstep 8 – Managing moods*.

### Breathe!

Manage your breathing to keep calm, and you'll communicate better.

### Know what you want to say

Think about what you want to say before you speak to someone. Try practising before you speak to them – it really works!

### How do you say it?

Think (and practice) tone and volume. Keep good eye contact. And remember – keep it simple!

## Connecting through open and honest talking

People living with pain sometimes tell us that they begin to wonder how to talk to their relative or friend, because so many conversations become dominated by pain, appointments or medicines. The relationship can end up falling into one or more common communication traps:

### Some common communication traps

- Mind reading, or second guessing what the other person is thinking
- Not being honest with each other or trying to protect each other from problems
- Misunderstanding what they are saying or what they want
- Not knowing what to say
- Guilt because you feel you shouldn't burden the other person
- Conflict because neither person's needs are being fully met



### Overcoming communication traps

- Having a mid-morning coffee together and chatting about what's in the paper or the plan for the day
- Identifying a time to do the week's menu together
- Being honest with yourself and your friend or relative about your own needs
- It is sometimes difficult to know what to say because we think the other person doesn't understand how pain affects us. The key is to tell them how you are feeling.



# Footstep 8

## Managing moods

It's normal to struggle with moods when you have persistent pain. Emotions or moods linked to pain can take over day-to-day life. Many people with pain say that finding positive ways to manage their mood changes makes a valuable difference to their pain and their lives. So how do they do it?



### Remember – it's not your fault

We all go through periods of 'moodiness' when we feel irritable, sad, frustrated or worried. People with pain often feel:

- Angry and frustrated**
- Fearful and worried**
- Low and unmotivated**

If you have these feelings then you probably find that they get in the way of your day-to-day life and feel quite overwhelming at times.

It is common to think that there is nothing you can do as they just 'take over' and go

on for a long time. This is because these mood changes come from the struggle of living with pain.

This is not your fault. It is more about how our human mind works when it is stressed with pain, we feel unwell or deal with difficult life events. The mind is trying to make sense of everything that is happening and cope with it all.

The good news is that you can do things to manage your moods better. We've put together nine ways to work with moods. The trick is to discover which ones work best for you and then use them often . . .

## Nine ways to positively manage your moods



### 1. Notice negative thoughts

Negative, unhelpful thoughts often quickly come into your mind and affect your mood without you even noticing them. This is what makes them so powerful and believable.

If you can get into the habit of spotting your negative thoughts as you have them, then you can use different techniques to balance or soothe them.

### 2. Practice 'balanced thinking'

Write down your negative thoughts and then imagine what a best friend would say if they knew you were thinking them. You'll start to see that these negative thoughts are not always 100% true or believable.

### 3. Do things that unwind your mind

Do things that unwind and soothe your mind, like walking the dog, listening to music, breathing calmly or doing craft activities – anything that is calming.

### 4. Build a list of positives

Building a list of positive things you've done today (or this week) will show you that you are coping or managing life, despite the pain.

### 5. Practice being kind to yourself

For instance, work towards fun goals in paced steps; do something enjoyable, like a meal out with a friend.

### 6. Learn from others with similar pain issues

Find out what other people do to deal with negative thinking and moods through local support groups or talking to other people living with persistent pain.

### 7. Get into helpful habits

Think about what made a really useful change for you last week – and then use it again this week. It sounds simple, but keeping on doing what works soon becomes a habit!

### 8. Discover other ways to tackle negative thinking

You can find self-help resources to manage moods in most local libraries or explore useful websites.

### 9. Get support from people you trust

Remember that you are not alone. We all need support and encouragement from others, so try not to feel bad about asking friends and family to help you.

# Footstep 9

## Medicines and nutrition



We now know that pain medicines only reduce pain for about 40 percent of people in the long term. And the side effects of pain medicines can have a major impact on your life.

A combination of these side effects, together with being less active because of the pain can lead to becoming overweight. This affects half of all people with pain. So getting your life back on track often involves making changes both to your medicines *and* nutrition . . .

### Do painkillers kill pain?

Medicines that people take when they have pain are often referred to as 'painkillers'. That word might make you think that if you take them, the pain will go. However, pain medicines are unlikely to do that for most people, most of the time.

We now know that only 4 in 10 people will get much benefit from taking any of them.

For medicines called opioids, which are drugs like codeine, tramadol and morphine, it is likely to be even fewer – only 1 in 10 people benefit from taking them.

Opioid medicines especially, can sometimes actually make pain worse. We think this happens by causing your nervous system

to become more sensitive so that pain intensity gets worse and you feel more pain.

### Side effects

All people taking pain medicines experience side effects. However, we now realise many people are also likely to be experiencing long-term side effects from using pain medicines for more than three months.

Common side effects include: feeling dizzy, sickness, sweating, confusion, tiredness, constipation, weight gain, dry mouth, increased pain, memory loss, mood changes and sleep problems.

It's not surprising, then, that many people prescribed medicines for persistent pain would much prefer not to take them.

### The good news

The majority of people who reduce or stop their medicines report that their pain being unchanged or even better than before.

They also say that overall, they feel much better as the side effects of the medicines lift – even when they might not have known they had them before making the changes.

### Thinking of reducing your pain medicines?

The most important thing to remember is: never stop taking medicines suddenly.

This is because your body has got used to having the medicines there and stopping them too quickly can make you feel very unwell. One symptom of this withdrawal is pain and that can also be confusing, as you may think the medicine was working better than it actually was.

If you decide you want to reduce your medicines, then always talk to your healthcare team first – your pharmacist, nurse or general practitioner.

Ask your health care team what other options are available – for example: exercise classes, support groups, counselling or psychological support to make sense of your pain experience.

They can help you develop a plan to make small, careful changes that are less likely to result in withdrawal.



### Nutrition

Being overweight gets people down and affects at least 50% of people with pain. Eating well and having a normal-range weight will help you to build better health and cope well with pain.

We asked people living with pain for their key tips on how to improve your diet and reduce weight.

Here's what they came up with:

### Top tips for healthy eating, from people living with pain

- Don't do yet another weight reduction diet – It can make you feel low even thinking about it!
- Medicines for pain can lead to you putting weight on
- Try and go Mediterranean instead!
- Healthy eating doesn't just help you lose weight – it helps joints, muscles and nerves work better too
- Low Vitamin D is linked to persistent pain
- Always have breakfast, even if very tiny portion. It helps the body be less stressed, tired – and less painful!
- Eat meals regularly with small portions if you are quite inactive

# Footstep 10

## Managing setbacks



Setbacks are very common in managing persistent pain. Being confident to deal with them is a 'must have' skill for an easier time. So let's look at how to manage setbacks well . . .

Setbacks can be due to many reasons – think of them a bit like what can happen to athletes in training.

For athletes, a setback can be due to injury, tiredness or mental challenges. A setback with pain is similar and is often linked to tiredness, pacing difficulties or mood issues.

A setback can sometimes be caused by changes in your medicines or the way you use them. Quite often setbacks are linked to an overactive pacing pattern.

And sometimes setbacks can happen for no clear reason at all.

### What triggers setbacks?

Setbacks can be triggered by many factors, such as feeling very low, having a viral infection, family illness, crisis with a child or elderly relative, working overtime or

going on holiday, worry over debts. Often there can be a combination of factors all happening at the same time.

### There will always be setbacks

Sadly setbacks are inevitable. The good news is that learning how to make a setback plan can help to:

- **Lessen the impact that they have on your day to day life**
- **Shorten the length of time they last**
- **Help ensure they happen less often**

### Make a setback plan

When a setback strikes: don't panic! Try to remember that it's only a short term problem – so don't stop everything. And if you haven't already done so, start building your setback plan . . .

### Setback planning

A setback plan is really just a personal list of things to do that you know will help. In the middle of a difficult time it's easy to forget the things that help us get through it. That's why it's a good idea to make your plan *before* a setback strikes.

So have a look at the ideas opposite. Try the ones that you think will work for you, or come up with your own. And if they work – add them to your setback plan!

### Don't forget those triggers

Can you think of triggers that have set you back in the past?

Why not add these to your plan too, so you can think ahead and try to avoid the activities or life events you know are 'high risk' for you.

### Make a plan together

Lots of people find it easier to make a setback plan when there's someone else they can talk it through with.

Ask your healthcare practitioner to help you build your setback plan.

With your plan in place, you'll be ready and more confident to manage the setbacks when they come.

### Ideas to try during a setback

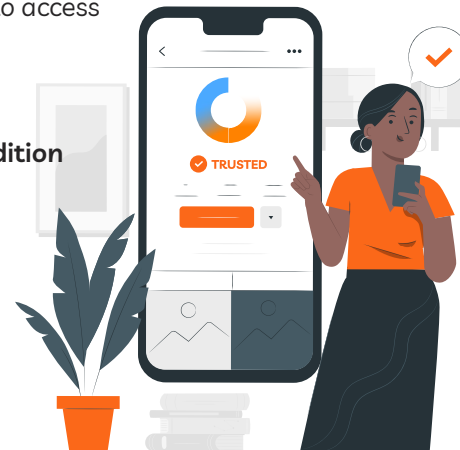
- Move more often and gently and pace well with more rest breaks
- Keep doing your fitness activities, but reduce by half your normal level for a few days
- Cut your standing and walking time limits in half
- Use heat or ice packs
- Give yourself rewards often to encourage yourself
- Increase your relaxation time
- Use your pacing skills even more
- Set yourself some SMART short term goals
- Plan ways to steadily increase your exercises and activities
- Keep a diary of what is helping you to manage the setback this time
- Let family and friends know what they can do to help
- Review (don't dwell on) recent activities that may have caused the setback. What can you learn from this?
- If you need medication then take it regularly 'by the clock,' and reduce gradually as the setback improves
- Remember where you were before this setback. Focus on your achievements and not the setback



For more tips and ideas about how to self manage your persistent pain why not visit the *Live Well with Pain* website?

*Live Well with Pain* is dedicated to providing easy-to-use self management resources that are used and trusted by many thousands of people living with pain – and the clinicians who support them. Everything is free to access and the site covers topics like:

- understanding pain and the brain
- accepting pain as a long term condition
- setting goals for yourself – and achieving them
- learning how to pace yourself, so you can do more
- relaxation and mindfulness skills
- getting a good night's sleep
- relationships and pain
- pain medicines and their side effects
- planning for setbacks – and overcoming them



Visit [livewellwithpain.co.uk](https://www.livewellwithpain.co.uk)

and start your self management journey today.

