What is pain?
Pain is the unpleasant feeling we have when our body’s tissues become damaged, or could be damaged. The amount of pain we feel for different things always varies from person to person. Pain involves a physical feeling in part of the body, but is also unpleasant and so is an emotional experience too.

Chronic pain is when pain continues for 3 months or more past what would be expected for a particular injury to heal, and doesn’t go away with normal treatment for pain. Chronic pain can be constant, but can also come in waves.

How does pain work?
When something hurts our body, our pain nerves (called nociceptor neurons) transmit the signal to our spinal cord and up to our brain.
These pain nerves join up to different nerves in the spinal cord which transmit the signal to the brain. These ‘joins’ are called synapses.

Our spinal cord can help us react quickly to the thing that is hurting us by making our body move away from the painful thing and/or curl up to protect ourselves. This all happens very quickly and happens before we actually feel the pain!

It is our brain that tells us that we are in pain and where the pain is. It is our brain that feels the pain – without a brain we wouldn’t feel anything! (If you have ever heard people being told their pain is “all in your head” – they are right since it can’t ever not be in your head!). This does not mean that you are imagining, exaggerating or making your pain up. It is your brain that is telling you how much pain you have.

Sometimes pain can start with some sort of injury or problem but then carry on even when this has healed – this often happens in chronic pain. This is because our brain can get stuck in a habit of feeling pain even when the cause has gone away. As we only feel pain in our brain, this pain is exactly the same kind of pain you feel when the cause was there at first. Sometimes people don’t understand this and may say that people are “making their pain up”, but this is just because they cannot find the thing that is causing it (as this might have healed).
Pain Gates
The joins (synapses) between our pain nerves, and nerves in our spinal cord can be thought of as ‘gates’ that allow the pain signal through. These gates also let other signals through too (like touch signals and vibration signals). This is how things like TENS machines work which send vibration signals through the pain gates to ‘squeeze’ the pain signal out of the way. Different things can make these gates open or close to let through different amounts of pain signal. Can you think of things that make your pain better or worse?

Below is a list of things that open and close people’s Pain Gates:

Open Gate > Feel More Pain:
- Stress
- Worrying (particularly about the pain)
- Arguments with family and friends
- Poor sleep
- Feeling down and depressed, angry, frustrated, frightened, wanting to ‘give up’
- Changes in activity levels – either overdoing things or not doing enough
- Paying attention to the pain
- Medical ‘flare-ups’
- Thinking negatively and ‘expecting’ to be in pain
- Plus many more...

Close Gate > Feel Less Pain:
- Distraction
- Having fun and doing things you enjoy
- Not focusing upon the pain or paying attention to it
• Thinking positively
• Relaxing
• Having help and support from family and friends
• Medication
• Pacing activities so not doing too much or too little
• Plus many others...

Because so many things can affect pain, this means no one thing on its own will help get rid of pain. Pain is complicated!

For example, this is why some days you can take pain relief for a headache and they take the pain away, and then try the same another day and it doesn’t affect your headache at all.

**Getting Stuck in the Pain Cycle**
The picture below shows the cycle that people can get stuck in with pain that can cause problems to spiral out of control:
Have you got stuck in the pain cycle too? Are you waiting for the Doctors to fix your pain, but nothing seems to be working?

Here are some ideas about things that you can do to try to help you cope with your pain. A lot of these ideas have worked for patients with very complex pain problems.

Different things will work in different amounts on different days. Just because something doesn’t work one day, doesn’t mean it won’t work the next day. It may take a lot of patience and practice before you get good at using these different strategies. Be kind to yourself if things don’t go quite to plan, don’t give up trying! ... Don’t let your pain win and rule your life!

The only thing you need to do to start is to be willing to have a go and see if they help – what’s the harm in trying? (You might even surprise yourself!)
Learning to Manage with your Pain

Medication
This is the thing that most people use to help with their pain. If you are reading this leaflet, then I am sure you have tried a lot of different medication for helping with your pain, but none worked perfectly for you.

All medications have side effects, and different people have different side effects to different medications. This is why your doctor may still be trying to find the best ones for you. It is all about a balance between the amount they take the pain away with the amount of side effects you are happy with. Make sure you talk to your doctor if you are not happy with your medication for any reason.

It is important you take your medication as your doctor has told you. Stopping the medication when you feel well may not be the best thing since you may quickly feel more pain again. Some medication takes time to ‘build up’ so if you stop too soon you may not feel the benefit. If you are not happy with how the medicine makes you feel talk to your doctor – if they don’t know they can’t help you!
Pacing Activities
You are probably like most people who suffer with pain: On a bad day (when you are in lots of pain) you rest and recover, not doing anything in case you make your pain worse. Then, on a good day (when you don’t feel in as much pain) you tend to want to do everything you weren’t able to do when you had a bad day, but end up over overdoing things...which leads to a bad day...and so on. This is known as a ‘boom and bust cycle’ (the ‘boom’ is when you do everything and the ‘bust’ is when you can’t do a thing).

For some people their boom and bust cycles can be weeks long, and for other people they can be hours long – it’s not always about good and bad ‘days’. They all have the same affect though – over time you don’t make any improvement at all!

Pacing daily activities (such as walking, doing school work, playing with friends, etc.) is a key tool for managing your pain.
By not pushing yourself on ‘good days’ but also doing a little of something (no matter how small) on ‘bad days’, over time the amount you feel able to do will increase! (see the graph) This is about being kind to yourself and not expecting to do things that you probably won’t be able to do.

It also involves taking regular breaks from the things you are doing, and making sure these breaks come before you need them.

It is also about breaking things down into small steps and doing them one step at a time.

If you were climbing a mountain, you wouldn’t try to get to the top in one giant step! You have to take one step at a time and if you keep going you will get there in the end!

**Sleep**

Sleep is hard to do when you are in pain. At night there is less to distract you from noticing your pain, and your mind is not performing as well as it does when you are not tired – this means pain can be a huge problem at night! We will talk more about things you can do when you are in pain at night further on in this leaflet (e.g. using relaxation). We must also think about how to make our sleep better as a way of helping this.
Keeping your sleep pattern (also called ‘sleep hygiene’) good is essential. This means going to bed at the same time (not too late) and getting up around the same time. Your body clock works in a routine and is easily messed up by changing when you sleep. If you rest and sleep lots in the day, you are not likely to feel tired at night. To help manage your pain, it is better you are awake in the day and not at night (when there is less distraction). It can help to:

- **Set an alarm** for getting up at a reasonable time. If you like to press ‘snooze’ then factor this in to the time you plan to get up and allow yourself e.g. 2 presses of the ‘snooze’ button.

- **Keep to a certain bedtime.** If there is a film or programme you want to watch on TV – record it! The old saying: “An hour before midnight is worth 2 hours after” is good advice!

- **Train your brain to think ‘sleep’ when you go to your bedroom.** By doing lots of things in your room other than sleeping, your brain can associate ‘being busy’ with being in your room. It can help to only use your room for relaxing and sleeping, and do active and busy things (e.g. school work, games consoles, TV) in a different room.

- **If you don’t sleep at night – don’t try to catch up in the day!** When people go on holiday and get ‘jet lagged’ they are not advised to sleep in the day time, but told to try to get back in the normal sleep pattern. This advice applies to you too! You will sleep better if you only sleep at night!
Looking After Yourself

Looking after your whole body is very important. Try your best to:

- **Eat a balanced diet** – as this can help your mood as much as physically by keeping your body fit and healthy. A balanced diet doesn’t mean eating ‘perfectly’, but it does mean not always eating treats!

- **Have good hygiene** – washing and grooming your body daily (as this stops infection and can affect relationships with friends, etc.).

- **Regular (low intensity) exercise or stretching** – as this helps keep you busy and also keeps your muscles stretchy and flexible. When your muscles aren’t used much, they tighten and this can lead to you feeling more pain! Walking is excellent and one of the best exercises that most people can do.

You might have been given exercises to do by your physiotherapist. Physiotherapists are excellent at understanding pacing and so all you will need to do is what they have set you to try. It can be difficult at times to feel motivated to do these stretches and exercises, and you might feel worse at first (due to tiredness, or soreness in your muscles) but this will pass with time if you keep going!

If you haven’t got a physiotherapist, it is important to make sure you get up and have a stretch and move around every once in a while. Never sit in the same position for longer than an hour without stopping to stretch and move a bit.
Dealing with Worries

You will have bad days! These are normal. It is not worth sitting around worrying and waiting for them to happen though, as this will mean you won’t do anything else! It also means you are less likely to do any of the things that will help to bring on a good day.

Our worries often start with small things, but in thinking about them over and over, they tend to spiral out of control. This means you may often be worrying about much more than you actually need to! Worrying means you are also constantly focused on your pain and so this is likely to make you notice and feel it more – making it worse.
It is how we reassure ourselves that things are not as worrying as we think that helps. It is important to try not to get carried away with our worries, and taking a step back to make sense of them. This can be done by:

- Talking about your worries with friends, family, doctors and nurses in hospital.
- Thinking about ‘gathering evidence’ as to whether or not you are right to worry as much about something as you do.
- It can help to write 2 lists for the following questions:
  - “What is the evidence or proof that I am right for thinking this?”
  - “What is the evidence or proof that I am wrong for thinking this?”
- Trying to prove yourself wrong for worrying!
- Think about what you would tell your friend if they were worried about this and needed to cope with it?

We can set ourselves up to fail by expecting things to go wrong, or expecting to feel pain before you do. Positive self-talk involves saying things over in your mind to reassure yourself and tell yourself that you can do the things you don’t think you can. The more you do this, the more likely you are to do well and to feel less pain. It’s a bit like having your own ‘cheerleader’ in your head – e.g.:

- I can cope with it
- It won’t be as bad as I think
- It might be difficult but I can do this
- I won’t let it beat me
These things can be hard to do at first, but the more you practice this, the better you will get at it. You will also find this easier to do on some days than on others – don’t worry about this, but don’t give up trying!

**Distraction and doing things you enjoy**

It is hard to distract yourself from your pain. This is because pain is meant to grab your attention so that you can move yourself away from the thing that is causing your pain. When you have pain that is caused by something inside your body (or the ‘habit’ your brain is stuck in) you cannot move away from the cause and it doesn’t help to pay attention to the pain all the time.

Doing things to distract yourself from your pain is important. Things that are more likely to distract you from your pain are things you enjoy doing, and things that involve being with other people. The relaxation technique below is also useful to use to try to distract from your pain – particularly in the night when it is hard to do things you enjoy.

**Relaxation**

Learning to relax is one of the most useful things you can do to help with your pain. It works by dealing with tense muscles as well as distracting your mind and slowing your thoughts down.
We all spend time ‘chilling out’ (and might even say we are ‘relaxing’) when we listen to music, lay back on our beds or settees, watch our favourite programmes on TV, play our favourite games, etc. This is all important stuff that helps to make us feel less stressed and worried, and can help with your pain.

Relaxing is different to ‘chilling out’. Relaxing is when we concentrate on slowing our bodies down and slowing our thinking down. Learning to relax can actually take a bit of effort to do at first but with practice you will get better at it! Below is a quick and simple way of trying to relax:

**5 Deep Breaths**

- Sit or lie comfortably with your legs uncrossed
- Close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath in filling up all of your lungs.
- Breathe it out slowly (for about 5 seconds).
- When you breathe out – let your body go floppy.
- Think of a picture in your head of somewhere that makes you feel calm, safe, happy and relaxed.

- This can be somewhere you have been (e.g. on holiday), somewhere you have seen a picture of and always wanted to go, or it can be a fantasy place.

- It is helpful to imagine being there with all our senses:
  - What can you see around you?
  - What things can you smell?
  - What things can you feel?
  - What things can you hear?

- Repeat this for 5 breaths
- Sit quietly for as long as you want after you’ve finished
At first it is helpful to practice relaxation when you are not in too much pain or too worried, as this will mean you will be better at using it when you are feeling this way.

There are other relaxation strategies that you may find useful, including guided stories that other people can read to you to help you imagine being somewhere that makes you feel more relaxed. Ask your Psychologist if you want more information about these.

**Building a support team**
Learning to manage your pain can take time, and you will often need help from people around you. It can sometimes be difficult to know how to ask for help. You may also have the opposite problem and have lots of people all trying to give you help and this may feel overwhelming.

It is important you work together with all the people around you to help you manage your pain. This may include family, friends, doctors and other people from the hospital. Find out how people might help you, and make sure you speak to them about the things that you feel they can do to help – plus the things that may not be helpful!
Setting Action Plans

Right, it’s time to start planning the things you are going to do to try to help with your pain. It is important you agree on when you are going to do things rather than just thinking/saying ‘some time’ – since setting a goal means you are more likely to do it.

Remember, keep things simple and small to start with, but also keep setting something to try every day.

You are likely to have ‘bad days’ too – so be prepared for this and make a set-back plan: Think about how you will cope if you can’t do the things you want to do, and how you might deal with your pain and disappointment.

Set-backs can actually be very helpful too! If you make a note of what might have triggered the set-back, then you can try to avoid it next time. You will also learn how to cope when things don’t go to plan; and this only makes you stronger for the next time you find things difficult! Knowing you can cope with a set-back can give you confidence to tackle anything!

... Remember you are more than just your pain! Don’t let the pain rule your life!

Contact Details:
Pain Nurse Specialists: 0161 701 5626,
Monday - Friday, 8.00 am to 4.00 pm.

We would like to acknowledge Dr Paul Manning, Clinical Psychologist at Sheffield Children’s Hospital who wrote the original version of this leaflet,
Notes:

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No Smoking Policy

The NHS has a responsibility for the nation’s health.

Protect yourself, patients, visitors and staff by adhering to our no smoking policy. Smoking is not permitted within any of our hospital buildings or grounds.

The Manchester Stop Smoking Service can be contacted on Tel: (0161) 205 5998 (www.stopsmokingmanchester.co.uk).

Translation and Interpretation Service

These translations say "If you require an interpreter, or translation, please ask a member of our staff to arrange it for you." The languages translated, in order, are: Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Polish, Somali and simplified Chinese.

اذا كنت بحاجة الى مترجم، أو ترجمة، من فضلك اطلب من أحد موظفيها ترتيب ذلك لك

أى ضرورتك لمترجم، أو ترجمة، فعليك الطلب من أحد موظفينا.

Jeśli Pan/Pani potrzebuje tłumacza lub tłumaczenie prosimy w tym celu zwrócić się do członka personelu.

Haddii aad u baahantahay tarjubaan, fadlan waydii qof ka mid ah shaqaalahaayga si uu kuugu.

如果你需要翻译或翻译员, 请要求我们的员工为你安排