

12 Myths About Pain

#1

Pain means harm or tissue damage

Acute (new, short-lived) pain protects us from harm, that's what it's for - to tell you to take your hand out of the fire. But long-term pain isn't always a sign that something's wrong or that we should stop what we're doing.

Pain is something our bodies learn to feel, and the feelings can continue long after the initial cause has passed. Phantom limb pain is the obvious example. But we all, to a lesser extent, learn and become accustomed to our pain. The good news is we can unlearn it, too.

#2

Persistent pain is rare

Persistent pain is COMMON and can affect anyone.

About 30-50% of people in the UK live with persistent pain. It is the leading cause of disability in the world. If you have pain, you are not alone.

#3

Medication & Injections can cure chronic pain

"I started getting pain-relieving injections into my back. The first couple were really effective but what I didn't fully appreciate was that the relief wouldn't last. I thought if I just had another injection, or more frequent injections, or another scan it would tell me what was wrong. When it seemed like further injections weren't working, I went for surgery (a spinal fusion and then later a spinal decompression). Despite initial good progress I was still in pain. Looking back, my way of thinking about pain was that it was the consequence of something else rather than pain itself being the problem that needed treating"

#4

Surgery will get rid of my pain

Surgery can be helpful for some medical conditions. However, in most cases if you have widespread pain then surgery on one part of your body is unlikely to make much difference to your overall pain. Generally speaking, the longer someone has pain, the less likely it is that surgery will help

In fact, surgery is only indicated for a minority of medical conditions, and even then, not everyone who has surgery reports great reduction in their pain or a complete fix in the long-term. Surgery can of course also be associated with significant complications.

#5

You have to take painkillers if you have pain

Medication may be necessary for some people in order to keep them well and manage health problems. Painkillers however do not 'cure' pain. In fact, although it might not feel like it, painkillers are optional. For a variety of reasons, not everybody takes or wants to take painkillers. Some people can't take painkillers because of other health problems.

Some have tried them and found the side-effects weren't worth it. Others have never found anything that helped, and some people find that even though painkillers helped to begin with they later stopped working and so chose to stop taking them. So the amount of painkillers someone is on doesn't necessarily reflect the amount of pain they are in, and vice versa.

#6

If my painkillers are not working I need stronger ones

Painkillers can sometimes be helpful in the short-term but many people with persistent pain do not find them helpful or find they have developed a tolerance to them (needing to take more and more for the same benefit). Disappointingly, painkillers are often not as effective as people we'd like or might expect them to be.

If you have tried taking a painkiller for a period of time and are not finding it helpful, taking more of that medication or a stronger medication will not necessarily help. It may risk more side-effects and potential short- and/or long-term harm.

- Some people end up on a lot of different painkillers without really being sure why they are taking them and what is helping. Ask your GP or pharmacist for a medication review if you would like advice and support to gradually reduce and come off any medication that is no longer helping you in a safe way.

#7

A scan or X-ray will show the source of my pain

Pain is invisible, it doesn't show on a scan or test.

Pain is usually the result of a combination of different things, most of which don't show up on scans or X-rays.

It's not unusual for scans such as X-rays to be normal even though people are in pain. On the flip side, it's also very common for abnormal findings to be seen on scans of people who don't have any pain.

You might be even more surprised to learn that scans can actually be unhelpful when it comes to managing persistent (long-term) pain as can increase unhelpful worry, thoughts, anxiety about their pain

#8

If you can't see pain, it's not there

Pain is invisible, people around you can be unaware of your pain and pain is not seen on a scan or blood test. The invisibility can be frustrating and those around you may not appreciate or believe the impact of pain on your life.

We know your pain is real and that your pain is having an impact on your quality of life, we are here to guide you.

#9

Persistent pain gets worse as we age

Pain does not necessarily get worse over time and pain is not a normal part of aging.

At any age, our bodies can adapt positively to new things and can respond to treatment.

#10

It is a bad idea to exercise with persistent pain

Exercise is not only safe for most people with persistent pain but is also one of the most effective ways to control pain and increase your physical and mental health.

A well-informed health/exercise professional can help you find a way to be more active, whatever your level of pain.

We will cover sessions on activity-based approaches

#11

Persistent pain means that the body has not healed

Most healing of our tissues occurs by 3-6months.

Whilst most of us would not be surprised to experience pain because of a new injury or illness, many people experience pain long after the body has healed, after 3-6months, when healing has occurred.

This happens because our body's natural alarm system (our nervous system) believes that our body is still in danger and therefore continues to produce pain to warn us to protect ourselves.

Some chronic conditions have chronic tissue changes / body changes – rheumatoid arthritis

#12

Worse pain means worse injury

It is common to experience high levels of pain with little or no injury or damage.

The opposite is also true; some serious and even life-threatening conditions or serious injuries can cause very little pain or even no pain at all (e.g. battlefield injuries or certain types of tumour)

Pain intensity is not a reliable indicator of the health of our body's tissues or the extent of an injury.

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