

Persistent Pain

This leaflet provides information about persistent pain. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is persistent pain and why have I got it?

You are not alone: the Faculty of Pain Medicine 2021 has published the incidence of persistent pain as 31-37% of the population. These are only the reported cases and it is known that everyone reports and experiences pain differently.

Long term pain is very different to acute pain. Acute pain is a warning telling us when a part of the body is injured and lasts for anything from a few days to three months.

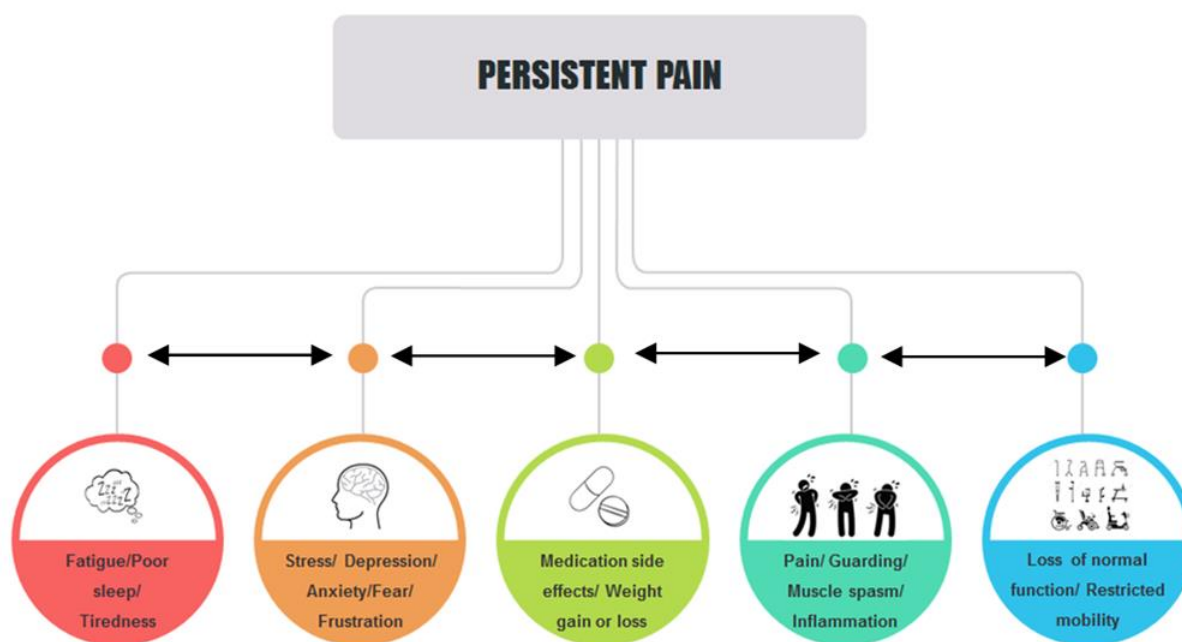
Persistent pain may develop from an initial injury or sometimes there is no obvious injury triggering it. It lasts more than three months and can persist for months or years.

Medicines to treat pain (analgesia) may help but no analgesia can treat persistent pain completely and often the side effects of the analgesia outweigh the benefit of pain relief.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Everyone will experience signs and symptoms differently. If your persistent pain has developed from an initial injury, it may not subside post recovery. Sometimes there is no obvious injury. Pain medications may stop working; you may build up a tolerance to medications and therefore require taking more which can lead to increased side effects.

Persistent pain can limit what you do in your life and you might find it stops you doing the things you enjoy. Persistent pain can affect many areas of your life. The diagram below shows how physical symptoms, level of activity and mood are closely linked and influence each other.



Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

There are no diagnostic tests to confirm persistent pain.

What treatments are available?

If you are on regular medication it is important to understand what you are taking and why and to always try to take your medication as prescribed and on time. You should also remember to eat and drink as advised.

Remember, no medication will stop persistent pain completely and the side effects of some medication outweigh the benefits for some people. Think about how well your medication is working for you.

This leaflet highlights some techniques to help with persistent pain.

Other treatments which you may wish to try are:

- Hot / cold packs
- TENS (Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) machine
- Massage and aromatherapy which can provide short term relief from persistent pain.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

If you feel that you fall into a cycle of persistent pain, you may wish to try the following tools to help you self-manage your pain. These self-help tools may have an extra benefit of giving you more confidence and a feeling of control and empowerment.

Prioritising and planning

Try listing your daily and weekly activities and prioritising them from urgent to not so urgent or things that can be left for another day. Creating an action plan can help you set simple and easily achievable goals.

Break up your tasks to keep each day manageable. Try not to overdo it and don't be scared to ask for help.

Keeping a diary

Keeping a daily diary of your activities and experiences with persistent pain may help you see how well you are doing and show you how much you have achieved. You can also write down when things don't work so well so you can reflect on this and learn from it.

Pacing

You may find that you tend to overdo things when you are having a "good day" or that your pain makes it hard to stay motivated.

Being active is important but it is also crucial to pace yourself and to carefully plan your activities and goals. You could try to break up activities into smaller, more achievable chunks, having short rests in between to get your energy back. This should help you to keep motivated and focused and prevent you burning yourself out or causing a flare-up of your pain. Try to be patient with yourself and try not to set goals you can't achieve.

Exercise

Regular stretching and exercise can help strengthen weak muscles, lift your mood and improve mobility. Exercise also helps to keep your heart and body healthy and releases endorphins which can give you happy feelings (euphoria). Pain can flare up after exercise so it is important to start with low impact activities like stretching, swimming, walking or any gentle exercise you enjoy. Start slowly and gradually build up.

Relaxation and distraction

Pain can make you feel overwhelmed, frustrated and less motivated and can cause a build-up of stress and tension in your body. Try to find time to unwind your body and mind. You may wish to try the following techniques:

1. Deep breathing exercises.

We often only take shallow breaths from our upper chest. Instead, try to breathe deeply from your abdomen, filling your lungs with as much fresh air as possible so you inhale more oxygen. As your breathing slows down and you continue to take deeper breaths you should find that your body and mind become calmer.

2. Visualisation or guided imagery.

Try to think of a relaxing image or memory which you find calming, e.g. your favourite place, your garden, the beach or the countryside. Focus on this image in your mind

while listening to soothing music or in silence. Close your eyes and picture your relaxing place as clearly and in as much detail as you can. You may find this helps you let go of your worries or negative thoughts.

3. Mindfulness.

You may find you get more stressed when you think about the past and what could have happened differently or if you worry about what may happen in the future. Mindfulness can help you live more in the here and now by making you aware of how you feel moment by moment. If you stay focused on the present moment more you may feel a calming effect. Mindfulness can be applied to all activities of daily life and can benefit anyone with regular practice.

Other types of relaxation and distraction techniques you could try are:

- reading
- listening to music
- dancing or singing
- walking
- gardening
- meeting family and friends
- cooking or baking
- colouring or painting.

Useful sources of information

You can find further information at: <http://www.britishpainsociety.org> and <http://www.paintoolkit.org>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about living with persistent pain, please contact either your GP or the team who were looking after you in hospital on 020 8672 1255.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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