

# Different Types of Pain

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## What is Pain?

Medically speaking, pain is an uncomfortable sensation that usually signals an injury or illness. Pain is the body's way of telling you something isn't right. This is the purpose of pain. It is meant to make you uncomfortable so if you are injured or sick, you will know you need to do something (or stop doing something).

When you do something that hurts your body, your brain normally triggers the pain response. If you touch something hot, the pain you feel is your body's way of telling you that you should stop touching the hot item and should take action to cool the skin. If you walk on an injured ankle and it hurts, that's also your body telling you to stop.

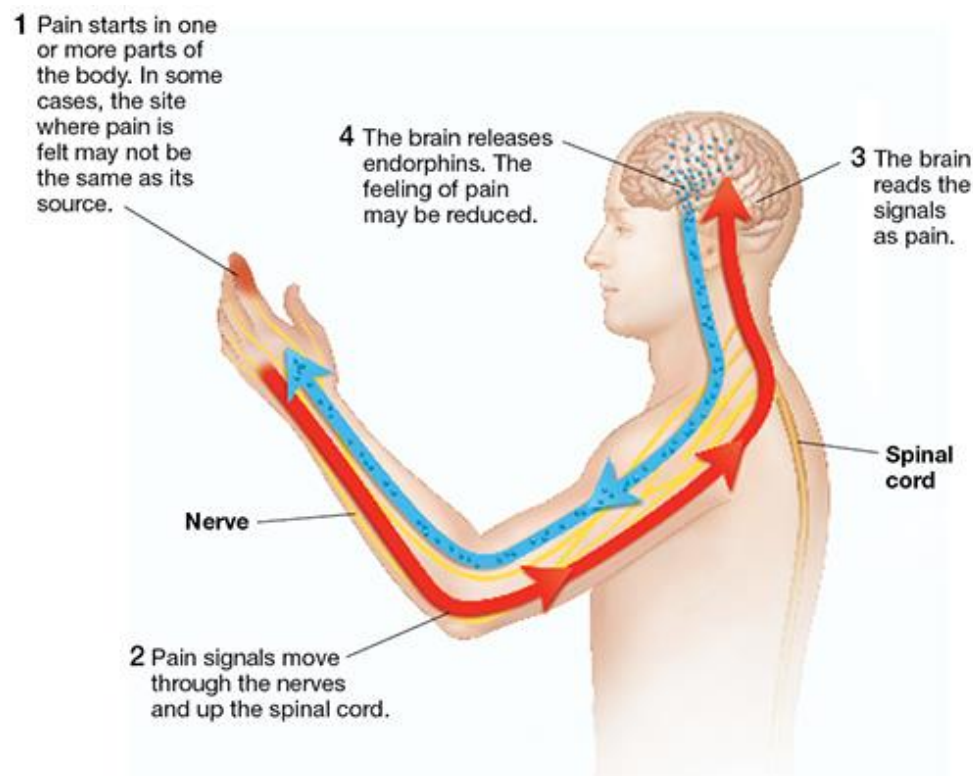


Image Source:  
<https://www.saintlukesk.org/health->

The perception of pain varies from person to person. One person might have a broken bone and not even realize it, while another might feel significant pain from that same injury. That's because pain is mediated by nerve fibres in your body, and these nerve fibres have the job of sending pain signals to the brain (which happens very quickly). Once they find their way to the brain, the brain acts to make you aware of the pain. Because every person's body is different, their nerve fibres and their brain can react differently to the same stimuli. That helps explain why pain perception and pain tolerance can differ so much from one person to another.

## The most common types of pain:

- Acute pain
- Chronic Pain
- Nociceptive pain
- Neuropathic pain

### Acute Pain

Acute pain is short-term pain that comes on suddenly and has a specific cause, usually tissue injury. Generally, it lasts for fewer than six months and goes away once the underlying cause is treated. Acute pain tends to start out sharp or intense before gradually improving. Acute pain also tends to be related to a soft-tissue injury or a temporary illness, so it typically subsides after the injury heals or the illness subsides. Acute pain from an injury may evolve into chronic pain if the injury doesn't heal correctly or if the pain signals malfunction.

Examples : Broken bones, dental work, cuts, burns.

### Chronic Pain

Pain that lasts for more than six months, even after the original injury has healed, is considered chronic. Chronic pain can last for years and range from mild to severe on any given day. Injuries or damage can cause chronic pain, sometimes there's no apparent cause. Chronic pain is often due to a health condition, like arthritis, fibromyalgia, or a spine condition.

Examples: Frequent headaches, nerve damage pain, low back pain, arthritis pain, fibromyalgia pain

### Nociceptive Pain

Nociceptive pain is the most common type of pain. It's caused by stimulation of nociceptors, which are pain receptors for tissue injury. You have nociceptors throughout your body, especially in your skin and internal organs. When they're stimulated by potential harm, such as a cut or other injury, they send electrical signals to your brain, causing you to feel the pain.

This type of pain you usually feel when you have any type of injury or inflammation. Nociceptive pain can be either acute or chronic. It can also be further classified as being either visceral or somatic. For example, a tear in a tendon will cause deep somatic pain, while a canker sore on your inner cheek causes superficial somatic pain.

### **Visceral pain**

- Visceral pain results from injuries or damage to your internal organs. You can feel it in the trunk area of your body, which includes your chest, abdomen, and pelvis. It's often hard to pinpoint the exact location of visceral pain.

Examples: gallstones, appendicitis, irritable bowel syndrome

### **Somatic pain**

- Somatic pain results from stimulation of the pain receptors in your tissues, rather than your internal organs. This includes your skin, muscles, joints, connective tissues, and bones. It's often easier to pinpoint the location of somatic pain rather than visceral pain. Somatic pain usually feels like a constant aching or gnawing sensation.

Examples: bone fractures, strained muscles, joint pain, connective tissue diseases, cancer that affects the skin or bones

## **Neuropathic Pain**

Neuropathic pain results from damage to or dysfunction of your nervous system. This results in damaged or dysfunctional nerves misfiring pain signals. This pain seems to come out of nowhere, rather than in response to any specific injury. You may also feel pain in response to things that aren't usually painful, such as cold air or clothing against your skin.

Examples: Infections, nerve problems, nerve inflammation or compression, shingles, carpal tunnel, central nervous system disorders (MS, Parkinsons)

## **Another type of Pain I think worth mentioning is.....**

### **Emotional Pain**

Emotional pain is pain or hurt that originates from a non-physical source. Sometimes this [emotional distress](#) is the result of the actions of others. Other times, it might be the result of regret, grief, or loss. In other cases, it might be the result of an underlying mental health condition such as [depression](#) or [anxiety](#). Emotional pain can add to our stressors which can then exasperate chronic illness symptoms.

Emotional Pain can often feel as strong as physical pain and at times can even cause symptoms of pain throughout the body. It can also have a detrimental impact on both short-term and long-term mental well-being. Part of this process is linked directly with the emotional centres in the brain. This means how we are feeling influences our pain. If we feel angry, depressed, or anxious, our pain will be worse.

The opposite is also true. If we are feeling positive and happy, our pain can seem to be less. We can cope much better.

This shows that pain is never "just in the mind" or "just in the body" - it is a complex mix involving our whole being and how our brain interpretes the signals. This mix can change from one day to the next, getting appropriate help and treatment is important.

### Pain in ME/CFS/FM

Pain is usually the central symptom in fibromyalgia and is often a problem for people with chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) as well. For people with FM, pain can be felt all over the body, it can start in one region and spread or move to another area. It may be accompanied by neurological problems such as intermittent tingling and burning or numbness in the hands, arms, feet, legs, or face. For people with ME/CFS, pain may be experienced in the joints or, more commonly, as an overall body pain sometimes described as feeling like being run over by a truck.

We all know that multiple events or stressors can lead to increased pain. (A picture diagram I found showing this)

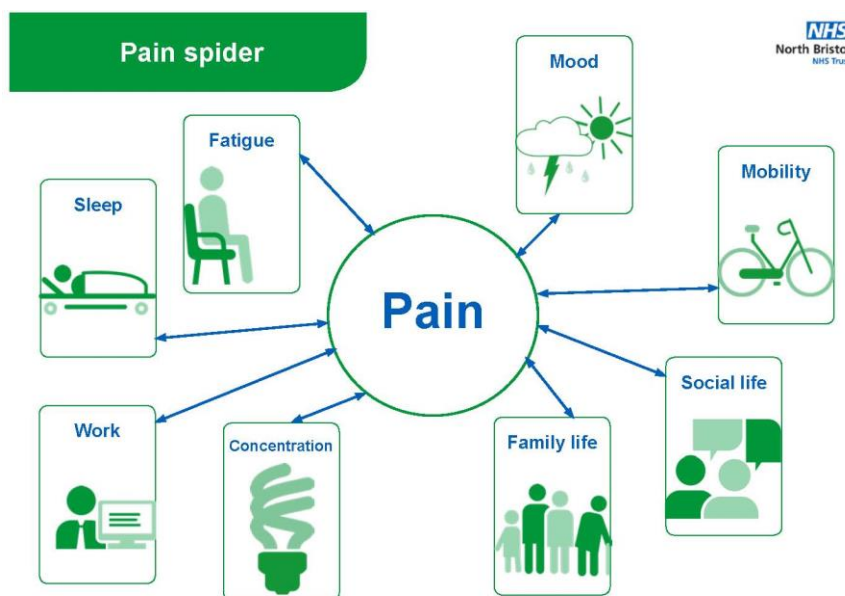


Image Source: <https://www.nbt.nhs.uk/our-services/a-z-services/pain-management-service>

## Pain Management Tools

Because pain is individual it is important to use pain management tools that work for you, here are just a few common tools that may help manage your pain outside of your prescribed medications. You may already be doing some or all of these.

- **Research and understand** what you are experiencing, the more you learn about pain the more you can understand. We have some great books in the library and there are many pain courses, information is power
- **Pacing** is a good tool to help to learn to manage your days so that you can conserve energy and have less flares. A frequent cause of pain is overdoing or having an activity level that is beyond a person's limits. Pacing offers a way to bring stability and control by keeping activity level within the limits imposed by illness. *Please speak with your Health and Wellness Facilitator if you require help or more information on pacing*
- **Sleeping and Breathing** are often processes which are disrupted when we contract with pain. Learning how to breathe deeply can help to reduce the pain and help to recentre ourselves. Practicing good sleep hygiene can enable a return to better sleep especially when we put in place plans on how to manage our pain
- **Exercise or Restorative Movement** is one of the most-commonly prescribed treatments for FM and can be helpful for ME/CFS as well. An exercise program done regularly can help reduce stiffness, counteract deconditioning, and improve outlook. Restorative Movement is learning how to move your body in a way that helps to reduce your pain and stiffness. Movement is so very important to many systems in your body and really can reduce pain if used correctly
- **Water** can help with pain, keeping hydrated is good for all our bodily systems. Soaking in bath with Epsom salts can be relaxing and help ease muscle pain, and exercise or movement in water can help take some of our weight making movement more manageable
- **Mindfulness and Meditation** can help you to learn to sit with and be present with the experiences of your body and this helps to create separation between yourself and your pain which in turn can help to reduce its sensation. You can do this via books, apps classes or just by focusing on doing one thing at a time

- **Art or Creative Activities** are great ways to help to focus the brain. Distracting the brain with creative experiences can help reduce the experience of pain. A simple art activity could be colouring in a picture, or sketching a leaf you collected on a walk, you don't need to spend a long time doing this, like mindfulness simply 5 minutes a day could be beneficial

## **Pain Management Programmes:**

**QE clinic** in Rotorua have a Recharge programme. This is a live-in clinic for 3 weeks where you have access to QE health and wellbeing facilities designed to help Rehabilitation for Change, Acceptance, Growth and Energy. This is accessed through *Lakes DHB, Waikato DHB, Taranaki DHB and Mid Central DHBs* via a doctors or rheumatologist referral. For more information see the QE health website <https://www.qehealth.co.nz/recharge>

**Pain Management Programme BOP** in Tauranga is 3-week programme 3 days a week and can be assessed through a referral from you GP. For more information see the bopdhb website <https://baynav.bopdhb.govt.nz/media/1171/chronicpersistentpainmgtprogramme.pdf>

*Your health and wellness facilitator may be able to help you research other programmes in your area.*

## **References**

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