

Patient information

Flare up management

What is a flare up?

Flare ups are periodic episodes of increased pain. They are not an indication of further damage. Even with the best management they can occur.

A flare-up may last a few hours, a few days to few weeks. The way you manage your flare up has a major influence on how you manage your pain in general. It is important that you have a strategy to manage your flare-ups so that you can get back on track to managing your pain.

Flare up plan

It is important to have a management plan ready for when you need it. This plan will help you feel more in control and help the pain to eventually settle. You need to work out your own flare-up plan using those parts of the programme that are most helpful for you. Once you have put your plan together make sure it is flexible and can be adapted as your needs change. Involve your family and friends in your flare-up plan. Remember your flare-up affects them too and may provoke negative thoughts and feelings that will impact on your ability to cope.

Your flare-up plan will be a combination of different activities. Try them in any sequence, keeping in mind that everything will need to be done more gradually and gently than usual.

The last page of this leaflet has a blank flare up plan for you to write down the things that help you in a flare up.

Persistent Pain Service
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Dealing with flare ups

- DON'T PANIC! This is only a temporary setback.
- Keep doing your exercises but only do half your usual number for each one.
- Cut all your sitting, standing and walking limits by half.
- Increase your relaxation time.
- Use your pacing skills
- Make a plan of how you are going to gradually increase your exercises and activity.
- Review the activities you had planned, and prioritise them. Ensure you have fun activities included during this time. You may need to negotiate extra help for this difficult time, some people find writing a timetable for the coming week extremely useful.
- Set realistic SMART short term goals.
- Keep a diary of what helped you to manage the flare-up
- Inform friends and family of what they can do to help
- Monitor your thoughts as unhelpful ways of thinking can make the flare-up last longer.
- Try to think about the flare-up in a logical rational way. Affirmations and positive self-talk can be beneficial.
- Acknowledge to yourself that this is a difficult time and resolve to be kind to yourself. Remember to give credit for how you are coping; only you know how hard you are working! Reinforcing treats for all achievements, however small they seem, are very important this time.
- Remember where you were before the flare-up. Focus on your progress to date and not on the flare-up.

When the flare up disappears

After your flare-up, it is quite useful to review why it occurred and how you coped with it. Your review plan could consist of:

- What led to the flare-up? Was it over doing an activity? What can you learn from this?
- Which coping strategy worked best for you during the flare-up?
- Recognise that you managed to use the skills learnt to cope with the flare-up
- Work out how next time you can decrease the chances of another set-back

Predicting flare ups

Flare-ups often are the result of a particular incident or situation; often the event or activity can occur in any of these situations

- Physically demanding tasks
- Unpredictable situations/environments
- Enjoyable and exciting activities
- When things appear to be going well
- Stressful situations

Effects of flare ups

It is important to know how these situations can affect your thoughts, feelings, actions and body.

Thoughts and feelings

During a flare-up there may be some negative thoughts such as:

- “I will never get any better”,
- “All my hard work for nothing”,
- “There must be something else wrong”
- “I should have been able to prevent this”
- “ I shouldn’t have done that activity again”

Actions

You may have noticed changes in your actions – e.g.

- Difficulty getting in and out of bed
- Not planning ahead or pacing
- Avoiding people
- Difficulty sleeping
- Taking more medication

Bodily changes

- Increased pain
- Changes in the area of pain
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension or weakness

My flare up plan

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www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

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