



Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Patient Information

Pain and Activity

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Pain and Activity

An Introduction to Pain

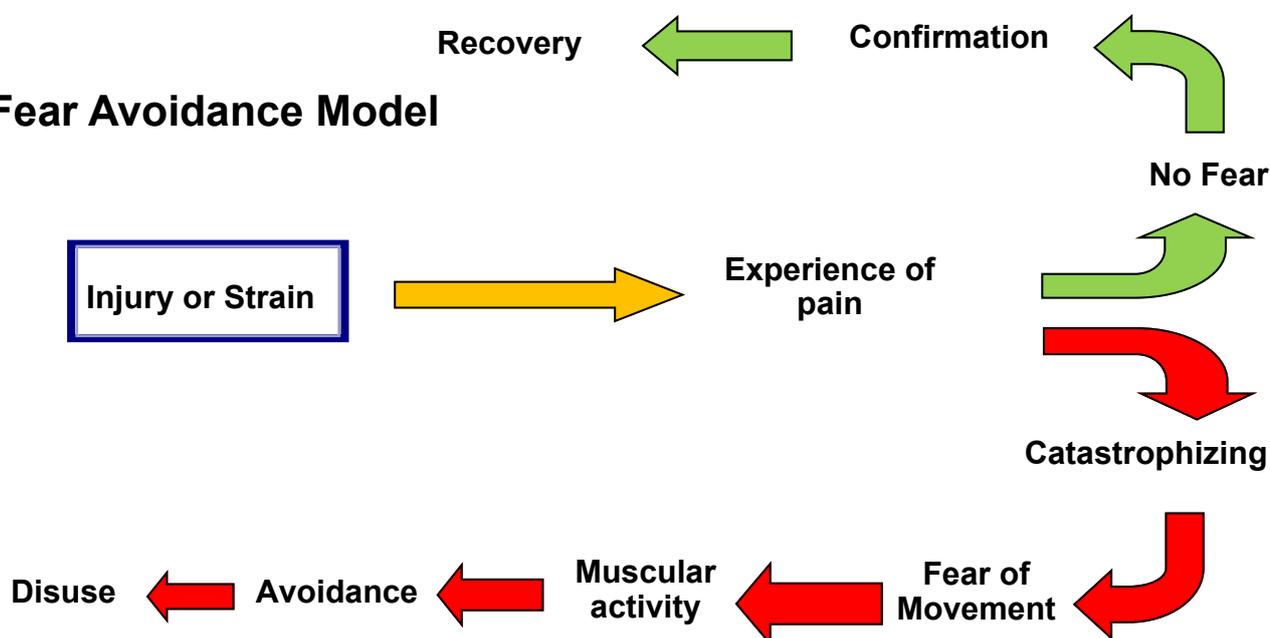
Most of us tend to think of pain as some form of physical discomfort. However, most of the experts now agree that the experience of pain is the result of a complicated set of different factors. Most of the time this experience is linked to some type of injury or illness, which may involve damage to one or more parts of the body. Pain felt at the time of an injury or illness and soon after is called acute pain, whilst pain which continues after the normal healing times for an injury have passed is known as chronic pain.

Pain can be very distressing and may significantly restrict what we feel able to do. This may include hobbies, work or even just spending time with our friends and family.

Pain and harm

Unnecessary concern about what pain means leads to us stopping doing normal activities and our fear of pain may limit us significantly. This makes us less confident and more sensitive to many activities, both now and in the future. The less we do, the less we find ourselves able to do. This is termed a 'hurt and harm' belief and is one of the main reasons why pain is often maintained long after healing has occurred.

Fear Avoidance Model



Why does pain often stop us from recovering?

The fear avoidance model helps to explain what happens if we believe our 'hurts' will 'harm' us. The model suggest that when we experience pain, if we are given negative information about the impact of our pain, or we **think** about the worst case scenario, or we believe we have caused ourselves lots of irreversible damage, we are likely to **do** less and less in the way of activity.

As a result our muscles and ligaments become weaker, we lose the stamina to do normal everyday activities and we lose confidence in our own bodies. As long as we continue to believe we have significant damage, we are likely to remain inactive. If this belief is reinforced by other people, we remain in this cycle of inactivity. However this inactivity has more to do with our beliefs regarding the problem, than the problem itself.

It is therefore really important that you are confident that you are not going to damage yourself before you start increasing your activity, otherwise you are likely to continue to avoid activity.

It now becomes clear that longstanding pain is less dependent on the original injury and more dependent on other factors, such as the ones described above. For these reasons pain is not always a good indicator of how much activity we should be doing. The science tells us, contrary to common myth, that staying at active is actually good for people with pain. The longer you are inactive, or off work, the more likely you are to maintain the problem.

