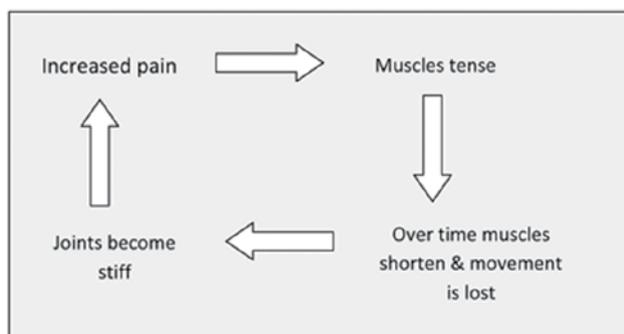


Pain Management Info Session 1: Stretching

This information sheet summarises the key information presented during the Pain Management session 1 at the Ipswich Hospital Pain Management Unit.

Why we need to use stretching

When we have long-term pain our muscles get very used to being tight for long periods of time. This can lead to muscles gradually becoming shorter. If muscles become shorter the joints that they support cannot move through their complete range of movement and can become stiff. Joint stiffness can become a source of pain. The cycle can look like this:



Gentle stretching can help to break this cycle, by lowering the tightness in our muscles. If a muscle is being gently stretched it will release some of its tension and start to relax. Stretching gently and frequently throughout the day can help to lengthen short muscles and loosen stiff joints, alleviating associated stiffness pain.

How to stretch comfortably without increasing pain

Stretching should be a slow, gentle movement into each position. **You should stretch until you feel a very gentle pull. Never stretch into pain:** if stretches are painful they make the body tighten up more. It is helpful to hold each stretch for a few slow breaths in and out so the muscle has a chance to relax.

Here are some suggestions of gentle stretches that you could try:

Head and neck

While sitting down:

- dip your chin gently to your chest;
- relax one arm down beside your body whilst you gently tilt your head away, bringing your ear towards the opposite shoulder. Repeat on the other side.

Arms

- Reach up, gently. You could try this sitting or lying, reaching with one arm at a time or both together.
- In a sitting position, reach back behind you, link your hands together and gently stretch your arms back.
- Rest your hands on your legs, one hand on each thigh and slowly slide one hand forward as you slide the other hand back.

Body

- In a sitting position, lean on your right buttock and stretch your right shoulder upward to elongate the side you are leaning towards. Repeat on your left side.
- Fold your arms and twist your body and head around to the right, then turn your head back to face forward, then follow with your body. Repeat on the other side.
- Place your hands on your thighs and bend your body forward while allowing your elbows to bend. Push with your arms to straighten up.

Legs

While sitting down:

- move your knees apart, feel the stretch then close them back together;
- keep your knees together and move your feet apart, feel the stretch, and then bring your feet back together.



While lying down:

- gently draw one leg towards your tummy bending at the hip and knee, supporting your leg using your hands;
- step back with one foot and try to get your heel onto the floor.

Remember that these stretches describe the full stretch that you are moving towards – it is important to **only move as far as you can go without increasing the pain**. If you need to do mini versions of these stretches, they are just as good for you.

Stretching is best done regularly throughout the day.

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Key points about stretching

- Stretch **slowly** and **gently** until you feel a gentle pull.
- Do **not** push stretches into pain.
- To get the maximum benefit, hold each stretch for a few slow breaths in and out.
- Keep breathing all the way through each stretch.
- Stretch regularly throughout the day for the best results.

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