

Understanding Your Pain Session – Managing Chronic Pain

Information for patients

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

Managing chronic pain

Chronic pain is a long-term condition and is caused by a different process in the body from acute pain, so it needs to be managed in a different way. Living with chronic pain is a bit like living with any other chronic (long-term) health condition, like heart disease or diabetes. It may not be possible to get rid of or cure the condition, but it is possible to improve the situation and limit the impact of pain on your life by learning to manage and cope with it effectively.

Given what we know about how the pain system works in chronic pain, the aim of managing pain is to do things in a way which helps close the pain gates (see separate leaflet). Over time this can help calm the over-sensitive nervous system and reverse some of the knock-on effects of the pain. This helps lower pain levels and make them more manageable, as well as allowing you to be more in control of the pain.

Medication can help with managing pain levels – but it is only part of the picture. Chronic pain is complicated and can have lots of knock-on effects; medical treatment with medication or surgical interventions is usually not enough on its own. We know the best results come when people who have chronic pain use a range of approaches, techniques and strategies to influence and manage their pain. These include both what doctors can offer (medical interventions) and also, importantly, what people can do to help themselves (self-management strategies).

You can think of managing pain as being like a jigsaw: one piece (medical treatment) is not enough; you need lots of different pieces (a range of self-management techniques) in order to make up the whole picture.

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If you would like to learn more about these self-management techniques, you can book to come along to our Pain Management Information Sessions. There are two sessions, a week apart, which run for 1½ hours each. During these group sessions you will find out about techniques, strategies and tips for managing pain, both day-to-day and during ‘flare-ups’.

For more details, or to book a place, call 01473 703436.

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Summary

Chronic pain is a long-term condition. It is caused by changes in the pain system which mean that the pain nerves stay ‘switched on’ and become too sensitive. It does not mean that your body is being damaged or harmed. It is not possible to ‘cure’ chronic pain – but it is possible to learn to manage and control it so that it becomes more manageable and has less of a negative impact on life. It is also possible to gradually and gently undo some of the ‘knock-on’ effects of pain on your body and how you feel.