

JUST A
LITTLE BIT
MORE
EACH DAY

PAIN AND FUNCTION

How daily activity helps with your chronic pain

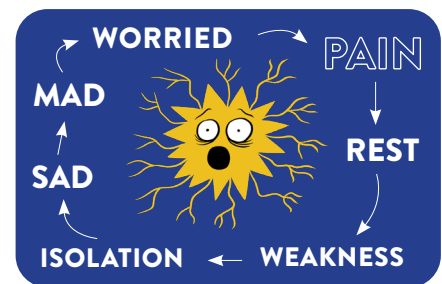
What do doctors mean when they say “function?”

When doctors say someone needs to improve “daily function” they mean they want kids to return to their typical day-to-day activities like **going to school, being active with friends and family, and doing the sports and activities they like to do.**

What does pain have to do with “functioning?”

When kids have ongoing pain, doctors often prescribe a treatment plan that includes exercise and **increased daily activity**. This can be understandably confusing for adults and kids alike. Most families hope that doctors will be able to first make the pain go away with medications or other treatments before you return to doing the things you want and need to do. Oh how we all wish! Many (if not most!) people are pretty surprised to learn that it (**VERY** unfortunately) doesn't work that way. And it's not because all doctors are super mean or don't believe your pain. It turns out that **increased exercise, more daily activity and a good sleep schedule need to be some of the early and key initial steps of a good treatment plan designed to decrease ongoing pain.**

CHRONIC PAIN CYCLE



To break this cycle, it's helpful to reduce rest and slowly increase activity. This leads to better strength, more time with friends and family, better mood, improved functioning, and less pain.

Why do doctors often say, “Function improves before pain improves”?

It turns out it's about science and not just to be really annoying. 😞 Chronic or ongoing pain often leads to resting and doing less activity. Over time, this rest can actually make you feel **more tired** which means you **lose strength and endurance**. This often makes pain worse. In order to get more energy and strength, you have to start little by little to do more activity. When you do this with the right supports in place, you start to build back endurance, get stronger, and change your pain experience. You are then “re-training” your body and your brain, and this then helps decrease pain over time.

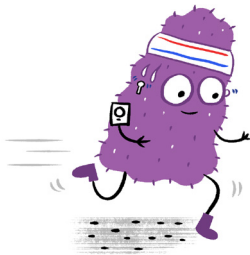
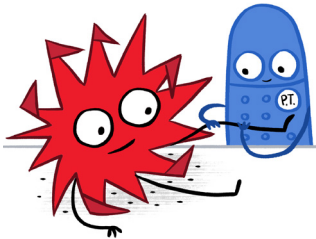
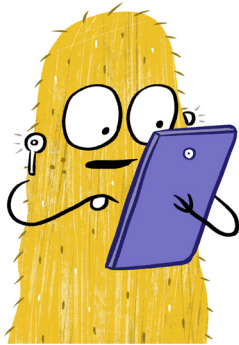
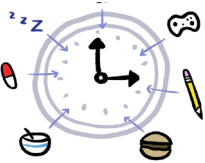
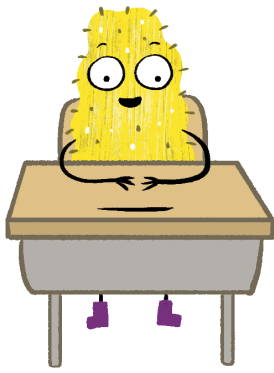
How can better function help with mood?

Pain can cause you to miss out on your usual activities so you can rest. Two things often happen next: **1) You get lonely and feel isolated from friends** and **2) You miss out on the joy and enjoyment of actually doing them.** It also messes with your usual sleep schedule. **All of this affects your mood.** Getting back to activities like school, sports, or hobbies helps you reconnect with people, feel better about yourself, have better sleep, and help to improve your mood.

How can you improve function when you still have pain?

We know it's not easy, but it is possible! Setting **small goals** is the best way to break the cycle of pain and low function. You can build strength and gain energy by doing **just a little bit more every day.** Making step-by-step goals can help you stay on track. Measuring your progress on a chart or using an app or fitness tracker can help you stay motivated and make it clear how much you are improving. Rewards can help with motivation too, and always be sure to **celebrate small victories!**

GUIDE FOR KIDS!



For more in this series:



HELPFUL TIPS!



Start slowly and be patient.

Remember that it takes time to build up strength and energy. Work with your medical team to find the right type of exercise for you. Usually, **low-impact** exercises like **swimming, bicycling, walking,** or **yoga** are good ways to start gently increasing exercise.

Even 5 minutes a day can be helpful!

Follow a schedule.

Setting a regular daily schedule helps your mind and body adjust to changes and makes it easier to meet your goals. Scheduling a time for exercise makes it much more likely it will happen. Set times for other important habits in the schedule such as **eating regular meals, drinking plenty of water, spending time with friends,** and **getting 8-10 hours of sleep.**



Pro Tip: we know it's not necessarily what you want to hear, but going to bed and waking up at the same time is really important for good sleep.

Pace yourself.

Learn the art of taking a break, but balance it with the art of sticking to it! What docs call " **pacing**" is finding the sweet spot of doing enough to make progress but not pushing yourself too hard that it pushes you over the edge into a pain flare. Avoid an "**over-do**" cycle of doing too much too soon or an "**under-do**" cycle of too little activity because **both can make pain worse.** Remember that what is right for you one day may change the next. It's important to listen to your body, but use your beautiful brain to aim for "**just right.**"

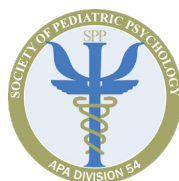
Find the fun.

Doing something you actually like to do makes it much easier to distract yourself and pay attention to something other than your pain. Consider things like **going on a walk with a good friend or your pet, playing a favorite game,** or **listening to music while exercising.** As much as possible, find something **FUN** to focus on while doing all the things you need to (and hopefully want to) do!

Cut the pain talk.

To feel better, and break the pain cycle, it is key to **NOT** focus on pain. **Talking about pain increases the focus on pain,** so it's important that your family and friends stop asking about your pain all the time. It's not about ignoring your experience, but supporting you focusing on other things and helping you with your coping skills. We ask your family to validate your experience when you bring up pain, and also help you to redirect to a coping strategy. What does this look like? It may be something like hearing them say: "**I know you don't feel good right now and it's really tough. What can you do to work towards feeling more comfortable?**"

Once the cycle of ongoing pain and resting too much is interrupted, mood and sleep often improve and that helps the recovery process!



A collaboration between Meg Foundation and the Society of Pediatric Psychology Pain SIG
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