

# How Pain Works

Understanding your pain is the first step to managing it

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## Key insight: Pain is always real — but it's produced by your brain, not your body.

Your brain uses information from nerves, emotions, memories, stress, and context to decide how much pain to produce. This means pain can be influenced — and that's good news for managing it.

1

### Pain is a protector

Pain is your brain's alarm system, designed to protect you from harm. But with persistent pain, the alarm becomes oversensitive — going off even when there is no new damage happening in your body.



2

### Your brain decides if it hurts

The brain weighs up nerve signals alongside your memories, emotions, beliefs, and stress levels to decide whether you need protecting. Two people with the same injury can feel very different pain.



3

### Nerves can become sensitised

With chronic pain, the nervous system gets 'wound up' — like a volume dial turned too high. Normal signals get amplified, so things that shouldn't hurt start to hurt. This is called central sensitisation.



4

### Thoughts & emotions affect pain

Stress, anxiety, poor sleep, and low mood can all turn up the pain volume. When your brain perceives more threat — from any source — it is more likely to interpret signals as dangerous.



5

### Movement is medicine

Gentle, graded movement is one of the most effective ways to retrain your pain system. It teaches your brain that movement is safe, gradually turning down the sensitivity over time.



6

### You can retrain your pain system

Understanding pain, pacing activities, improving sleep, managing stress, and building confidence all help rewire your nervous system. Recovery takes patience — but it is absolutely possible.



## Think of your pain system like a volume dial:

### ■ TURNS PAIN UP

- Poor sleep
- Stress & worry
- Fear of movement
- Low mood & isolation



YOUR PAIN SENSITIVITY

### ■ TURNS PAIN DOWN

- Understanding your pain
- Gentle movement & pacing
- Good sleep habits
- Relaxation & social connection