

# Pain COVID

Pain Management Service



## Pain COVID (adapting Dr Russ Harris' FACE COVID)

Here are some practical steps you can take to manage distress associated with chronic pain and the coronavirus crisis:

- P** Plan what is in your control
- A** Accept your difficult thoughts and feelings
- I** Involve yourself in the present moment by learning mindfulness
- N** Notice your surroundings and what you are doing
  
- C** Commit to keep doing what is important to you despite setbacks
- O** Open up to having difficult thoughts and feelings
- V** Values: Learn how to live your life the way you want to
- I** Identify key resources to improve your quality of life
- D** Disinfect and socially distance to keep yourself safe

### **P = Plan what is in your control**

The COVID 19 pandemic is impacting on routine health service delivery. Pain management appointments were put on hold, for example your physiotherapy, psychology and medicine reviews. You may have been waiting for or attending a pain management group that has been disrupted due to the pandemic.

You may be feeling a range of emotions such as sadness, anxiety and uncertainty. Your pain may produce unique worries. You may be worried about things that feel **outside** your control; things that are connected with the virus such as you or loved ones becoming ill or the financial impact of 'lockdown'. You may be missing your family, friends or carers who normally provide your support network. You may have found that the work you were doing about learning to self-manage your pain has been affected

by what is going on; for example, spending more time out of the house or more time with friends.

These worries are understandable. However, there are things that are within your control:

- **Medical support for your pain**

Contact your GP for medical advice relating to your pain. This may be over the telephone or via video link to reduce potential exposure to COVID 19. Ask your GP about repeat prescriptions being sent online to your pharmacy and the possibility of repeat medications be delivered to your front door. This is a useful link to get information about covid19 and medical conditions:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tailored-advice-for-those-who-live-with-specific-medical-conditions/>

- **Pain appointments**

Contact the Pain Secretary for information about cancelled or postponed appointments. We will have already contacted you about this but if you need a reminder the Pain Service can call you back.

- **Practical help**

Investigate and then make a list of the practical support you need. This may be debt advice or access to emergency food that you need then plan what you need to ask about. There are useful links at the end of this handout.

- **Behaviour**

Remember we can control our behaviour more than our thoughts and feelings. The table overleaf has some examples of practical steps you can take based on common values (how you want to live your life):

**Value: Physical and mental wellbeing**

Plan some daily exercise either outside your home or if you are shielding inside your house. Go for a walk around the block or in your garden if you have one. Start with a 2 minute walk then gradually increase the time over a number of weeks.

Remember to pace your activity to reduce flare ups. For example set an end goal such as a 30 minute walk. Start with a 10 minute walk then gradually increase the time over a week.

If you are working from home try to make sure you have regular changes of position, maybe standing then sitting.

**Value: Structure**

Try to set a timetable for each day with tasks.

Get up at the same time each morning.

**Value: Feeling useful**

Plan tasks that give you a sense of achievement. They may be practical such as housework, DIY, or mentally challenging, such as, puzzles, helping your children with their home learning or helping a friend by offering telephone or online emotional support.

**Value: Self-care**

Set regular mealtimes and plan your meals. This will reduce any stress associated with going to the shops or ordering food online.

Reduce your caffeine intake (found in tea, coffee and some soft drinks). This will calm your nervous system to help reduce any anxiety and improve sleep.

Reduce your alcohol intake (too much alcohol can lower your mood, increase anxiety and make you feel sluggish).

Avoid TV or screens in the bedroom to link your bedroom with sleep only.

Have a wind down ritual such as a soothing bath or a relaxation exercise.

Set your alarm for the same time each morning even after a bad night.

If you can't sleep, don't toss and turn in bed. Get up and only return to bed when you are sleepy tired. This will also help you link your bed with sleep and not frustration.

- **Fact Checking**

Check the facts about COVID 19 and make a plan of who to contact if necessary. It is helpful to set a limit to checking the news intake and try to look at trustworthy websites such as: <https://www.who.int/>

### **A = Accept your difficult thoughts and feelings**

We all experience difficult thoughts and feelings at times and the current coronavirus situation combined with chronic pain may increase these thoughts and feelings. Many people notice that this can increase their physical pain, for example through tensed muscles. Be kind to yourself; difficult thoughts and feelings are normal for all of us, particularly those with chronic pain, never mind during a pandemic. Being aware of these thoughts and feelings can help.

### **I = Involve yourself in the present moment by learning mindfulness**

You may also notice that you try to block out difficult thoughts and feelings by engaging in unhelpful behaviours, for example, oversleeping, drinking alcohol or excessive cleaning. This may flare up your pain by under activity or over activity. Learning how to accept and "be with" thoughts and feelings is a skill. Headspace has a useful website/app: <https://www.headspace.com/>

The Glasgow Pain Management Service has produced several audio mindfulness exercises to help with pain related distress and this can also help with distress about COVID-19. Mindfulness can help you become less caught up with your thoughts and feelings:

<https://paindata.org/selfmanagement.php>

### **N = Notice your surroundings and what you are doing**

When we experience difficult thoughts and emotions or urges to behave in unhelpful ways there are ways to steady yourself and give you more control over your behaviour. Here is a short exercise that can help:

Practice “5, 4, 3, 2, 1” while taking slow deep belly breaths (Belly breathing link found here:

<https://stresscontrolaudio.com/home>)

5 things you can **See** around you

4 things you can **Touch**

3 things you can **Hear**

2 things you can **Smell**

1 thing you can **Taste**

### **C = Commit to keep doing what is important to you despite setbacks**

Ask yourself several times a day, ‘What can I do, no matter how small, that will improve my quality of life or those around me?’ Whatever you decide, notice yourself doing it right now.

### **O = Open up to having difficult thoughts and feelings**

Allow difficult thoughts and feelings to show up for you. If someone you cared for was experiencing your thoughts and feelings what would you say to them? Self-kindness is essential when living with chronic pain and with the challenges that the coronavirus situation has brought. There may be a need to be

open to distress that arises when you need to adjust your behaviour right now. For example you may value independence but have to rely on neighbours to do shopping because you are shielding. By allowing yourself to experience difficult thoughts and feelings using mindfulness you can ensure you get the help that you need.

### **V = Values: Learn how to live your life the way you want to**

Once you make room for difficult thoughts and feelings you can get in contact with what matters to you; your values. This is the way that you want to live your life. How to live the life you want may be challenged by not only your pain but also the social restrictions we find ourselves in. You may have started on thinking about values with the pain management service.

The beauty of living your life based on your values is that you can adapt your activity to different situations. For example, if you value social activity but find yourself living alone, can you connect online? If you value helping others can you phone a friend and ask how they are?

### **I = Identify key resources to improve your quality of life**

Useful websites to find out the facts and where to access support:

- <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>
- <https://www.readyscotland.org/>
- <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/your-health/health-issues/covid-19-coronavirus/>
- [www.gov.scot/covid-stay-safe](http://www.gov.scot/covid-stay-safe)

You can find more detailed sections about physical and mental health here:

- <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/your-health/health-issues/covid-19-coronavirus/for-the-public-patients/staying-active-and-well/>

## **D = Disinfect and socially distance to keep yourself safe**

By reading this handout it can be assumed that you greatly value your health and wellbeing. This makes following the advice for keeping you safe essential. Follow this link for further information about practical ways to keep yourself safe:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-general-advice>

If you work in health or social services in Scotland then this is an excellent resource: <https://www.promis.scot/>

In summary, chronic pain and the coronavirus situation combined can feel like a challenge that is out with your control. The good news is that there are steps that you can take to help you feel prepared and safe.

(Handout adapted from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUYM>)