



JUST A  
LITTLE BIT  
MORE  
EACH DAY

For Kids & Teens:

# PAIN AND FUNCTION

## How daily activity helps with your chronic pain

### What does pain have to do with “functioning?”

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.**

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. The push for functioning does not mean doctors don't believe you. Your pain experience is real, and this is a **very important** part of the plan to help you feel better.

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

It turns out it's about science. Chronic or ongoing pain often leads to resting and doing less activity. Over time, this rest can actually make you feel **more tired** and when you're not doing as much 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 and get stronger. You are “re-training” your body and your brain, and this then helps decrease pain over time.

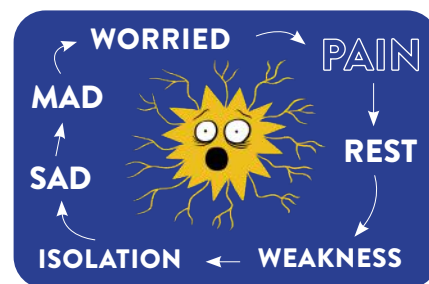
### How can you improve function when you still have pain?

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, so always be sure to **celebrate small victories!**

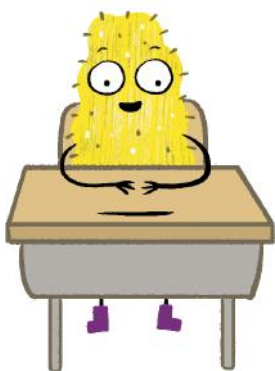
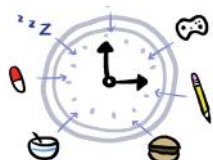
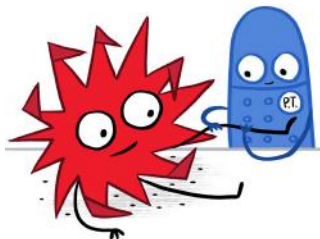
### How can better function help with mood?

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. All of this affects your mood.** Getting back to activities like school, sports, or hobbies helps you reconnect with people, feel better about yourself, and helps to improve your mood.

### 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.*



For more in this series:



# HELPFUL TIPS!



## 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 enough sleep.** (Check out the sleep handout for more info!)

**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.



## Move your body.

Remember that it takes time to build up strength and energy. Work with your medical team to find the right type of exercise or movement for you. Usually, exercises like **swimming, biking, walking, or yoga** are good ways to start. Even 5 minutes a day can be helpful!

## Keep a steady pace.

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 too hard. 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.** It's important to know that when you use this strategy your sweet spot will change - you will be able to do more and more over time.

## Find the fun.

Doing something you actually like to do makes it much easier to make progress with your goals. Consider things like **going on a walk with a good friend or your pet, playing a favorite game, or listening to music while being active.** 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.

*Creating a function game plan is important but can be challenging. There are professionals like physicians, psychologists, and physical and occupational therapists who can help! Ask your medical team about the resources in your area.*



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

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