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In this new four-part miniseries, N.CK SINTELD tackles four of the most commonly held back pain myths that delay or even prevent rehabilitation and recovery. Nick is a chartered physiotherapist, BackCare Professional Member and Clinical Director for Spring Active.



"Pain meens the damage is stil there or gotting worse" - MYTTE

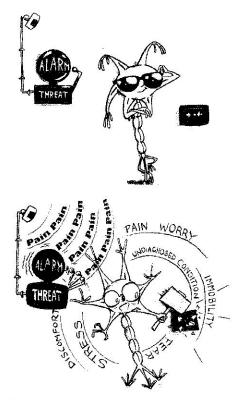


When the body is injured, pain signals allow an amazing repair process to take place to heal the structure. This repair process takes a maximum of 3-6 months and usually, as the tissues heal, the pain gets less and then disappears. However, sometimes pain can continue to be felt in these areas even though the tissues have healed. This type of pain is known as chronic, long-term or persistent pain. Although it is often difficult to find the cause of persistent pain, we know that it is due to how the brain processes information from the body and environment.

Every part of your body has nerves in and around it. The nerves in your lower back connect to the spinal cord, so that messages can be sent from your tissues to the brain. The nerves will tell your brain if any part of your body is under threat. The brain interprets these messages and initiates any action needed to keep you safe and well. All this happens very fast and automatically without you being aware of it!

In some people the warning signals do not settle down even though the tissues have healed and the pain continues. We are not sure why this happens, but we know that these signals can be increased by a variety of things. Do any of these statements fit your own situation?

- Not getting an acceptable diagnosis for the cause of your pain.
- Fear of movement and exercise.
- Anxiety about the impact on your income and family.
- Doubts or concerns following X-ray or MRI results.



© Negative experiences with healthcare professionals.

When you have had pain for a while the nerves around your back can become over-sensitive. This means that it will take much less general activity to set off messages that indicate a threat is present. The brain gets these messages and interprets them as meaning that damage is occurring even though it isn't and the result – pain! You naturally think that something serious is causing your pain!

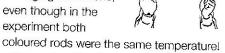
Are your nerves over-sensitive?

Do any of these statements fit your own situation?

- © Pressure on your skin or around the painful area is very sensitive.
- You are generally doing a lot less activities than before the pain.
- When doctors test you, all movements are painful.
- Cold temperatures set off your pain easily.
- © Just thinking about certain movements or tasks sets off your pain.
- Stressful situations make your pain worse.

Your mind can play tricks on you! In one study, people were shown red rods contacting the skin. Red is associated with heat and danger, and these rods produced more pain

than blue coloured rods which are associated with cold, nondamaging sensations, even though in the experiment both



The parts of the brain that process pain also connect with the parts that relate to your beliefs and understanding about your pain, other sensations, everyday stresses, worries about the future, treatments and more. For example, if you believe that a certain activity will increase your back pain, just having that belief may activate your pain map.

But it is not all bad news! Once you know that nerves can become over-sensitive and that a lot of pain is due to this, you can learn how to turn down the sensitivity and make the pain easier.

## Take back control

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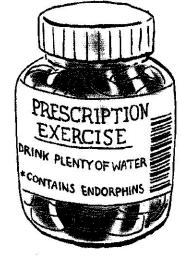
## Part 2:

"Exercise is dangerous for me, I need to protect my back from moving" - MYTH!

A common effect of pain is that you can become fearful of movement or believe that a certain movement will damage something. You think you are doing the right thing by protecting your back, when in fact you should be moving and doing physical activities that move the spine normally. Moving and bending consistently with a rigidly protected back will prevent your recovery, not help it! By not bending and moving correctly, this places strain on already sensitive soft tissues.

This protective muscle guarding limits the back moving as it is meant to. Your anxiety and fear of moving the back can generate altered movement and ongoing stiffness. Restoring confident fluid movement in the spine will, over time, make it less sensitive to flare ups. When starting to exercise, it may well make your back sore - it is important to be aware of this - but this soreness does not mean it is getting worse. It is similar to moving and exercising an ankle after a sprain.

Getting the rate of exercise right and gradually increasing it is the important part. Your exercise plan should be a journey of sustained commitment, not too timid, not



too aggressive in your approach and aiming to achieve a slow and steady increase in the amount of activity you can do. Ease up if you need to, but always keep moving forwards. Even if your pain and stiffness is longstanding, the structures of the spine must move in order to recover and function correctly for everyday life.

Developing an understanding of the body and visualising what is happening inside the back makes exercise and movement easier and helps to reduce the fear. Remember, your back is surrounded by many strong muscles and ligaments and these require movement.

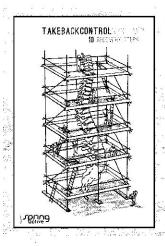
Your muscles work

together to keep the spine balanced and in control. All the muscles around the spine play an important role in making smooth co-ordinated movement possible. If your wrist just came out of plaster after a fracture, you would be told to get it moving as soon as possible to help the healing and return the joint to normal. Compare this to your back, which is made up of lots of joints which need fluid movement, not over-protection and guarding.



The muscles are the orchestra and our brain is the conductor

In overcoming your fear of movement or certain activities,





your own attitude makes a big difference. The more fearful or tense you become, the more difficult it is to move freely. This is where strong resilience, staying calm and clear thinking are important for recovery.

## Benefits of movement

- Reduces muscle spasm and tension
- Improves blood flow, reduces inflammation and provides nutrients to the area in pain
- Increases soft tissue mobility
- Increases confidence to complete everyday activities
- Reduces anxiety
- After 10 minutes of exercise, the brain produces "happy chemicals" that have a calming effect on nerves.

Spring Active is offering BackCare members a 15% discount on its self-management workbook The TakeBackControl System -10 Recovery Steps. Enter coupon code SA28 for this discount at www.springactive.com/back-pain-shop