

Practical Guide for People with Pain



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Introduction—How can you use this book?

Living with pain can be confusing and difficult to deal with. Many people with musculoskeletal pain—such as back, neck, shoulder, or joint pain—receive large amounts of advice and information from the internet, friends, or healthcare providers. Some of it is helpful, some misleading, and much of it can feel hard to understand. Beyond understanding information, people often struggle to **know where to go for help**: who to see, what questions to ask, and how to make sense of different opinions.

This book is made to help you, your family, and others who want to learn about pain. It will **help you understand health information better and find your way more easily when using healthcare services**. It aims to make you more confident when searching for help, asking questions, thinking about different treatments, and using advice in everyday life.

The goal of this guide is not to tell you what to do, but to support you in learning **how to think critically about pain and care**, so that you can make good choices and take an active role in your recovery. It will help you to:

- **understand pain and how to manage it**, in ways that make sense for your situation.
- **find and access reliable sources of care and support**, both online and in your community.
- **decide which advice or treatments you can trust and which are relevant to you**.
- **use what you learn in daily life**, through small, practical steps that help you move more, take part in life, and feel better.
- **think about and change common beliefs about pain**, so that fear or frustration do not hold you back.

Each section of this book focuses on one of these abilities and offers short explanations, self-reflection exercises, and examples drawn from everyday experiences. The short stories you will find—called vignettes—show real situations that people with musculoskeletal pain often face: being unsure about exercising and resting, having difficulties communicating with healthcare professionals, challenges at work, being confused about scan results, medication, or personal goals. These stories are not instructions or medical advice but are **made to help you think and learn**. Each one shows a skill that can be learned: asking helpful questions, understanding your body, finding good care, or coping with setbacks.

You can read this book from beginning to end or open it at the section that feels most helpful to you right now. Use it as a **companion and a guide**—something to come back to when you feel lost, when new information confuses you, or when you need encouragement to keep moving forward.

From the authors

This book was created by a group of healthcare professionals and researchers with lots of experience in musculoskeletal pain care and education. We know that living with pain often means trying to make sense of complex information, visiting different professionals, and facing uncertainty about what to do next. Our goal is to make reliable knowledge and practical guidance available to everyone—patients, relatives, and the general public—so that people feel more confident, informed, and supported in managing pain and using healthcare services effectively.

What does self-management mean?

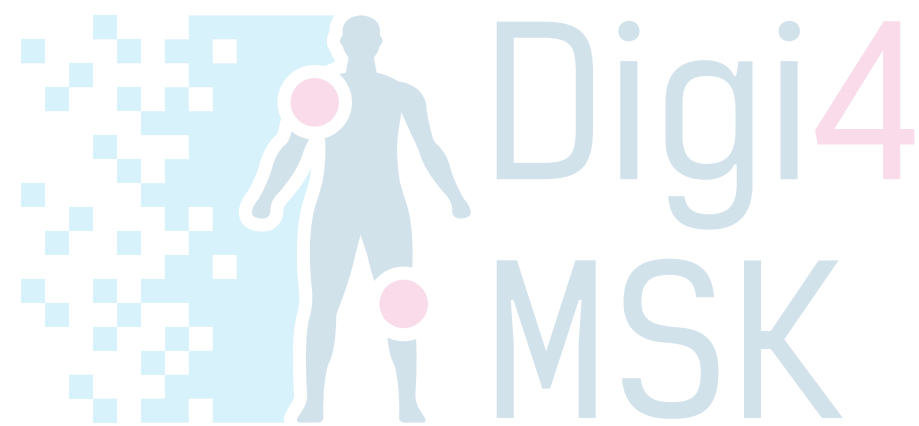
Self-management in musculoskeletal pain means learning and using practical skills that help you live well with your condition. It is an active process where you take the main role in looking after your health, while your healthcare team supports and guides you.

The idea is simple. There are many things you can do in daily life that make a real difference to your pain, your movement, and your overall wellbeing. Self-management helps you understand these options and use them with confidence.

Key elements are:

1. **Understanding your condition:** You learn what affects your pain, what usually helps, and what tends to make symptoms worse. You also learn how your lifestyle, such as sleep, stress, and daily activity, can influence how you feel.
2. **Building confidence to act:** You practise trusting your ability to move, exercise, and carry out daily activities. You learn that pain does not always mean harm, and that gradual, steady progress is possible.
3. **Using helpful behaviours each day:** This includes regular movement, simple home exercises, pacing your tasks, relaxing your body and mind, improving sleep habits, and making healthier choices in daily life.
4. **Making informed decisions:** You are supported to make choices based on clear and trustworthy information. This helps you decide when to move more, when to rest, and when to ask for help.
5. **Managing emotions and stress:** Living with pain can be frustrating or worrying. Self-management includes recognising these feelings and using strategies that help you cope, such as breathing exercises, mindfulness, enjoyable activities, or seeking support from others.
6. **Working together with your healthcare team:** Self-management does not mean doing it all on your own. Your clinician helps you understand your condition, set achievable goals, and choose strategies that fit your daily life and needs.

Overall, self-management means gaining the knowledge, skills, and confidence to take charge of your musculoskeletal health. It can help you stay active, feel more in control, and improve your quality of life over time.



1. Chronic pain: Does it mean you cannot improve?

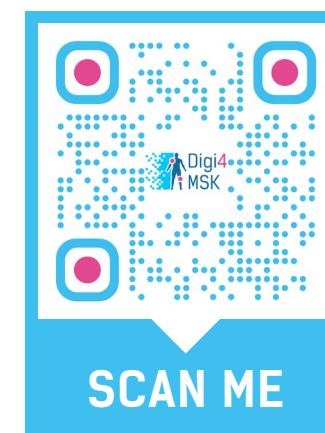
Javier, 47, had spent most of his life lifting heavy materials at construction sites. One morning, after carrying a stack of tiles, a sharp pain shot through his lower back. The doctor said it was probably a muscle strain. Months later, the wound had healed, but the pain still came and went without warning.

To understand what was happening, Javier had an MRI. The report mentioned “*some disc degeneration and a small disc bulge*,” but the specialist explained that many people his age showed the same and had no pain at all. The result only left him more confused.

He began to avoid anything that might make things worse. He quit his job, stopped walking the dog, and even turning in bed made him anxious. “*If it hurts, something must still be damaged*,” he told himself. Some days the pain flared after stress or sleepless nights; other times it eased for no reason.

Friends said to rest more, others told him to stretch, and online advice only made it harder to know what to believe. The worst part was not the ache itself but the feeling of being trapped in it—with no clear cause and no clear way out.

When his physiotherapist later mentioned that long-lasting pain could act differently from a fresh injury, Javier felt both sceptical and curious. *Could pain really change even after years?*



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding what chronic pain means and how it differs from pain after an injury.
- Recognizing common scan findings that do not always explain pain.
- Becoming aware of everyday factors—stress, rest, and activity—that can influence pain over time.

YouTube link: https://youtu.be/lfbK36_IDe0

1.1. What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts for more than three months. This label implies that the pain is a little more complex than short-term pain caused by an acute injury.

1.2. Why does chronic pain persist?

Science tells us that pain is not just about damage to a body part. Lifestyle choices, activity, sleep quality and other factors such as beliefs, experiences and habits can all make pain feel worse.

Changes can occur in the body's protective systems such as the nervous system, which explains why some people feel pain even when scans and blood tests are completely normal. **This means they may continue to experience pain without injury.** It is like an alarm system that is stuck in the "on" position, even if there is no actual danger.



1.3. What can be done?

The good news is that **chronic pain can be managed**. Just because it has been there for a while does not mean that nothing can be done. Here are some strategies:

- **Movement & Exercise.** Light physical activity might relieve some of your pain. Gradually increase your activity levels over time. Remember, it may be ok to move even if you have moderate pain!
- **Better Sleep & Stress Management.** Good sleep can reduce your pain levels, and methods such as meditation or breathing exercises can help reduce stress.
- **Professional help.** Things associated with a healthy lifestyle (such as sleep, exercise, working, social life, regular diet...) are also likely to help - but most of the time it is not the same thing that helps everyone, so it is important that you find out what helps you. A health professional can be one way to get support in finding out how you can learn to self-manage.

Takeaway messages:

Chronic pain means the pain has been there for a while, but with the right management plan, its negative effects can be reduced. If you or someone you know is dealing with chronic pain, know that there are steps you can take.

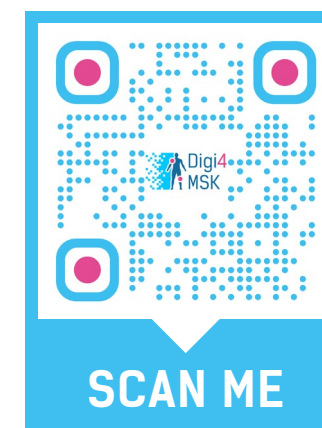
2. Is pain always a sign of an injury that has not healed?

Laura, 39, works as a graphic designer. She spends long hours sitting at her desk and often feels a dull ache in her neck and shoulder. It started after a stressful project a few months ago. At first, she thought she had simply “pulled a muscle,” but the ache never fully disappeared.

After several visits to different clinics, she received mixed messages: one doctor said her muscles were “*inflamed*,” another mentioned a “*mild disc bulge*,” and a third reassured her it was nothing serious. Yet the pain kept returning, especially after long days, poor sleep, or when deadlines piled up. Each time it appeared, Laura worried she had re-injured herself.

She tried massage, changed her chair, even stopped doing yoga for fear of making things worse. But nothing explained why the pain seemed to fade for a week, only to come back after an argument or a sleepless night. “*If there’s no big injury*,” she wondered, “*why does it still hurt?*”

The uncertainty began to shape her days—checking her posture, scanning for twinges, and thinking twice before lifting her bag. The more she worried about harming herself, the more tense her body felt. One afternoon, her physiotherapist gently asked, “*What if pain doesn’t always mean new damage?*” The question stayed with her long after the session ended.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding that pain can appear even when tissues are not newly injured.
- Recognizing how different factors—stress, fatigue, or tension—can make the body more sensitive.
- Learning to interpret pain as a message of protection rather than proof of harm.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/EvTdutRb0fE>

2.1. Does pain always mean that there is tissue damage?

Pain is like an alarm system that lets us know when something might be wrong.

For example, when you sprain your ankle, pain acts as a warning of a possible ligament injury and helps limit certain movements that could make it worse. This is because the chemicals that your body release after an injury activate your nervous system, causing signals to your brain. Nevertheless, as the tissue heals, these chemicals disappear, and pain will normally go away. However, in some instances pain can persist after the injury has healed.

2.2. Why can pain continue after healing?

This can happen for different reasons:

1. The nervous system becomes more sensitive, so things that did not hurt before, like a certain movement, can be painful for longer than anticipated.
2. When body parts are not used enough, they may lose physical strength and capacity, and become less able to handle normal movement and activity, such as doing household chores. An example of this is when, after a successful surgery, some people experience pain for several months, or years.

2.3. How to understand persistent pain?

If your body begins to respond to normal stimuli as if they were dangerous, you can experience that anything from light touch to normal movements can start to feel painful. Researchers are not really sure how or why this happens, but you can think of it like an allergy (for example, to movement).

The best way to deal with this “allergy” is to find a balance between things that you like or need to do, and things that you know can help you reduce your pain before, during or after you have been active. In these cases, treatment should not focus on the injury, but on the progressive readaptation of the body to normal use.

2.4. When to seek help to manage the pain?

If pain gets worse or new symptoms arise, like swelling, fever, or weakness—do not hesitate to seek advice from your healthcare provider.



Takeaway messages:

Pain sometimes exists after an injury has healed. This is likely to be caused by adaptive processes in your body that cannot be seen on scans or in the blood.

Knowing this can help you feel less anxious, help get you moving, and give you a push in the right direction.

3. Is “poor posture” the common cause of back pain?

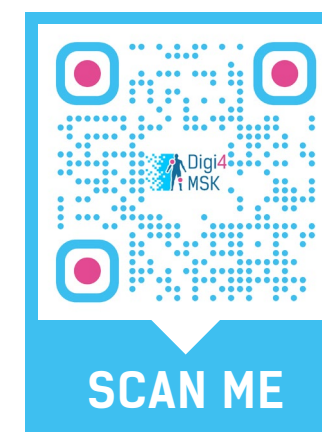
María, 32, works as an architect. She spends most of her day in front of her computer, carefully drawing building plans. For months she had been waking up with stiffness in her lower back. Her first thought was, *“It must be my posture”*.

She started to pay attention to every position she took—how she sat, how she bent, even how she slept. Each time she felt a twinge, she straightened her back instantly, afraid of ruining her spine. She bought an expensive chair, used a lumbar cushion, and downloaded an app that reminded her to sit upright every twenty minutes. Still, the pain came and went.

At work, her colleagues joked that she looked like a statue. Even at home, watching television, she did not dare slouch. When the discomfort spread to her shoulders, she grew frustrated. *“I’m doing everything right”* she said, *“but my back still hurts”*.

One afternoon, a friend mentioned that she had back pain too—despite being very active and having perfect posture. That confused María even more. If posture was to blame, why did so many people with different habits have the same problem?

Later, her physiotherapist smiled and asked gently, *“Do you think there’s only one correct way to sit?”* The question stayed in María’s mind as she left the clinic, sitting a little more naturally than before.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding that there is not one “perfect” posture for a healthy back.
- Recognizing that pain can come from many factors—movement, tension, fatigue—not just posture.
- Learning how to vary positions and listen to the body’s signals without fear.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/qO7nCePyKZM>

3.1. Is poor posture really the problem?

Many people try to maintain what they think is 'good posture' all the time to avoid back pain.

However, science suggests that the problem is not related to posture, but rather the amount of time we spend in the same posture.

We know from research that there is no ideal posture that fits everyone. Rather, some people can sit anyway they like, while others find that moving or changing positions is the best way to avoid pain. But...Do you know how you can manage your pain?

3.2. What are the factors besides posture?

Here are some ideas on how to manage back pain:

1. **Go for a walk or several walks every day.** A sedentary lifestyle—for example, sitting a whole day—is unhealthy and walking at a moderate pace can not only reduce back pain. It can make your back pain be gone for longer.

If your work can be characterized as "office work" you may benefit from doing strength training. It can be as little as a five-minute program, which you can do near your desk, or it can be fitness or strength training in a gym.

2. **Understand your pain.** If you know what makes it worse and how to make it less or even go away, then you are in control of your pain. This is an important step in your self-management.

Techniques such as being distracted from work, an audiobook or being around friends can be very helpful. Also, heat from a heat pack, or a shower, normally reduces pain.

Remember that most techniques and treatments only work for a short period of time, but once you learn to use them, you can repeat them again and again whenever you want or need to.

3. **Take a break.** If your work includes static, repetitive or awkward positions, you may find that small breaks can be very helpful. Breaks of as little as five minutes help some people.

Instead of trying to maintain a 'perfect upright posture', try and focus on learning techniques to control your pain. Each person has their own way, and it may include changing posture frequently, finding a relaxed way to sit or stand, go for a walk, do strength training or take short breaks during the day.



Takeaway messages:

There is no right or wrong posture but staying in the same position for a long time can become uncomfortable. Poor posture is not the main cause of back pain, nor is good posture the solution, as there is no 'right posture'.

It is important to move and learn how to control your pain. For example, by stretching or interrupting the static sitting position a little more. By understanding what really affects your pain and having the tools to manage it, you can take steps to improve your well-being and feel more in control of your body.

4. How does sleep affect pain?

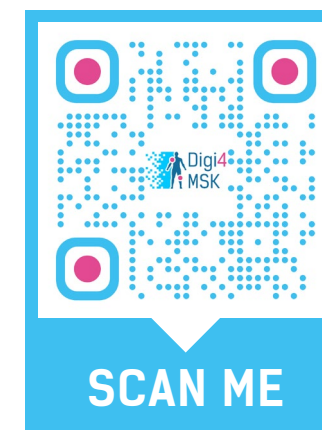
Elena, 42, works alternating day and night shifts at a supermarket. Her lower back started aching after long hours standing at the checkout. At first, she blamed her shoes and bought new ones, but the soreness did not go away.

The pain was worse after her night shifts. She noticed she woke up feeling stiff, and by the end of the week, her whole body felt tense. *"Maybe it's my job"* she thought, *"or maybe I'm just getting older"*. Still, what puzzled her most was how pain seemed stronger after a bad night's sleep, even when she had not done anything extra.

At home, she often fell asleep on the sofa with the television on, then tossed and turned the rest of the night. Her alarm clock felt like an enemy. Caffeine and painkillers helped her stay awake, but by the weekend she felt exhausted and sore.

One morning, after sleeping barely four hours, Elena tried to stretch and felt her back tighten again. It did not make sense—how could simply sleeping badly make her hurt more? She started wondering if rest itself might somehow be connected to pain.

When her physiotherapist asked about her sleep routine, she hesitated. No one had ever linked her pain to her sleeping habits before. For the first time, she began to wonder if recovery did not just depend on movement, but also on how well she rested.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how poor or irregular sleep can increase pain sensitivity.
- Recognizing that good sleep helps the body recover and manage pain more effectively.
- Learning everyday strategies to improve sleep quality and reduce flare-ups.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/DAXcbrImYts>

4.1. What is the role of sleep in pain?

Sleep plays an important role in your body's ability to recover from daily strain. Here is how it happens:

- During sleep you remove chemicals from your brain, helping it recovery and sending out signals to the rest of your body, which helps your body maintain daily functions.
- Poor sleep quality, like not getting enough sleep, or waking up and not being able to fall asleep again, can make pain feel more intense the next day.

Having a basic understanding of how you can improve your sleep can be helpful (for example, avoid intense stimuli before going to sleep such as watching videos on the cell phone or eating heavy meals). If the problem is more important and you have a sleep disorder, Cognitive behavioural therapy might be an effective treatment. Some people experience that pain becomes less and easier to control once they get regular sleep.

4.2. What can you do to improve your sleep?

Here are some simple strategies:

1. Going to bed and waking up at the same time helps regulate the body's internal clock. Look for triggers for your sleep disruption. For example, try not to stay in bed too long if you are unable to sleep. In such a case, get up, do something relaxing, and go back to bed.
2. While exercise is good for you and can help improve your sleep quality, you should avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime.
3. Alcohol, caffeine, and TV or screens before bedtime, can disturb your sleep and make it less effective. For example, blue light from screens can mess with melatonin, a chemical that tells your body when to sleep and wake up. Avoiding them at least two hours before bedtime can be helpful.
4. Try slow nasal breathing exercises, meditation, a warm bath or shower, or gentle stretching 30-60 minutes before bedtime, and see if that helps you fall asleep more easily.



Takeaway messages:

Lack of sleep and poor sleep quality can make pain worse.

By taking daily steps to improve them, your pain and general wellbeing may improve.



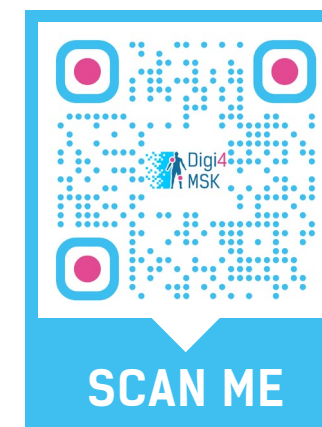
5. Should you stop all activity when in pain?

Mateo, 51, manages a small grocery store. His days are long, filled with lifting boxes, standing, and constant movement. One morning, after unloading a delivery truck, he felt a sudden pull in his lower back. The pain caught him by surprise. *"I'd better not move for a few days"*, he thought.

At first, the plan seemed to work—lying down gave him relief. But as the week went by, getting out of bed became harder. His back felt stiff, and even simple things like tying his shoes or carrying a shopping bag made him wince.

Concerned, he went to his family doctor, who found no serious injury but advised him to stay attentive and to move gently if possible. Still unsure, Mateo decided to rest a little longer. A week later, his pharmacist noticed him buying another box of painkillers and asked how he was feeling. *"Still sore"* Mateo said, *"I'm afraid to make it worse"*. The pharmacist nodded and suggested that he speak to the physiotherapist at the nearby clinic, who could show him ways to move safely.

Mateo hesitated. *"Move? When it hurts?"* he thought. Yet the stiffness and frustration were becoming worse than the pain itself. That night, he wondered if staying still really was the safest choice—or if it was keeping him from getting better.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding why avoiding all movement can slow recovery and increase stiffness.
- Recognizing when rest is useful and when gentle activity is more effective.
- Learning how different healthcare professionals—doctors, pharmacists, and exercise specialists—can guide safe, gradual movement during pain.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/vVJFwe4INZI>

5.1. Why is it not helpful to stop all movement?

Taking a break from certain activities can be beneficial if you are in pain, but not moving at all can make things worse:

1. Without movement, muscles and joints can become stiff, making the pain feel worse.
2. Inactivity leads to gradual loss of muscle mass, making it difficult to return to normal activities.
3. The nervous system can become more sensitive if the body is inactive for a long time.
4. Gentle exercise and physical activity in general promote blood flow, which helps circulate oxygen and endorphins, the positive hormones, throughout the body.

5.2. When is rest appropriate?

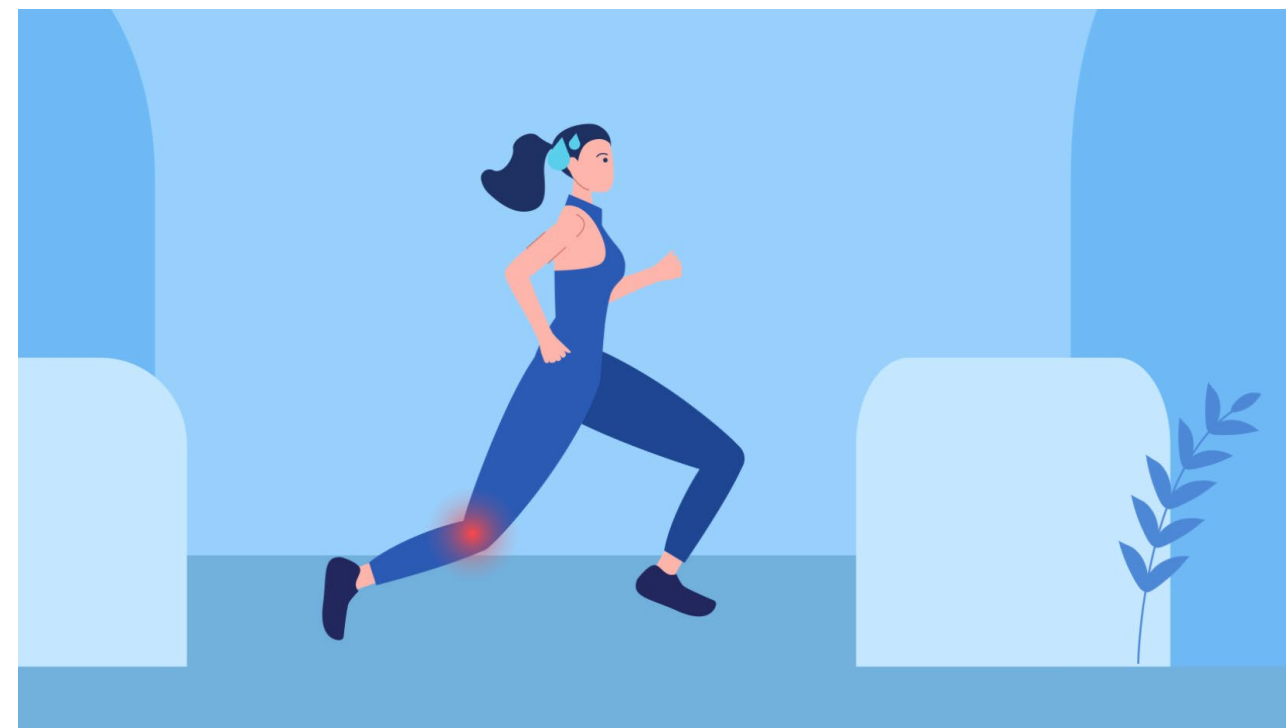
Although movement has a positive effect on pain, there are certain situations where exercise should be limited:

1. If you have severe pain that is made worse by movement. For example, if movement makes the pain worse or very sharp, take a break and try again later. If the pain persists or progresses, you should see a medical doctor.
2. If there are significant signs of injury, such as recent change in the appearance of the limb related to trauma, see a healthcare professional.
3. If the pain is accompanied by other unusual symptoms, such as numbness or fever, see a doctor for an examination.

5.3. How to keep moving safely?

Instead of giving up all physical activity, try changing the way you move. Here are some safe ways to stay active:

1. Do low-impact activities. Activities such as walking, cycling or water aerobics are good examples.
2. Modify your movements. Do not stop doing the activities you enjoy but adjust their intensity or range of motion to suit your condition but keep moving. Get an exercise professional such as a physiotherapist to help you do this.
3. Increase your activity gradually. Start with small movements or low intensity and slowly increase as your body gets used to them.



Takeaway messages:

When you are in pain, stopping all movement is not usually the best choice. Light activity can help reduce pain and stiffness, keep your muscles strong and improve your well-being. If you are not sure, speak to your healthcare professional!

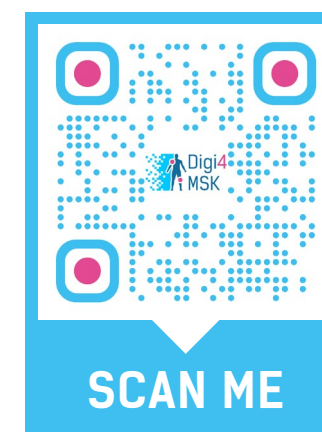
6. What is important to know about ibuprofen?

Rosa, 58, works as a school administrator. She has been living with knee pain for years and keeps a small box of ibuprofen in her handbag—just in case. Whenever the pain flares, she takes a pill, sometimes two, and gets through the day.

At first, it seemed like a perfect solution. The pain eased, she could walk comfortably, and she did not have to miss work. But lately, Rosa had begun to notice heartburn at night and a heavy feeling in her stomach. *“Maybe it’s the stress”* she thought, brushing it off.

One afternoon, while picking up a new box at the pharmacy, the pharmacist asked, *“How often are you taking these?”* Rosa hesitated. *“Most days”* she admitted. The pharmacist explained gently that while ibuprofen helps relieve pain and inflammation, taking it regularly or on an empty stomach can irritate the stomach lining and affect blood pressure or kidneys—especially when combined with other medicines.

Rosa listened quietly, realizing she had never mentioned her daily pills to her doctor. She always assumed that, because ibuprofen was sold without a prescription, it was completely safe. That evening, she looked at the half-empty blister pack and wondered how much she really knew about what she was taking.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how ibuprofen works and when it is appropriate to use it.
- Recognizing possible side effects and interactions with other medications.
- Learning how pharmacists and doctors can help you use pain medication safely and effectively.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/OY1Kkz9RNKE>

6.1. How does ibuprofen work?

Ibuprofen is a medicine that helps reduce pain, inflammation and fever. It works by blocking substances in the body called prostaglandins, which cause swelling, redness and pain, when you are injured or sick.

It has typically been used in short-term conditions such as sprains, infections or occasional headaches. However, it is not the best choice for managing long-term pain, as prolonged use can have side effects.

6.2. What are the possible side effects of ibuprofen?

Some of the most common side effects include:

1. Stomach irritation, which can cause pain, heartburn or, in severe cases, ulcers.
2. Kidney problems, especially in people who already have kidney disease.
3. Increased blood pressure, which puts additional stress on your heart and blood vessels.
4. Cardiovascular risks, as it may increase the likelihood of severe problems in the heart or brain.

6.3. How to use ibuprofen safely?

To stay safe using ibuprofen, follow these tips:

1. Keep in mind the dosage. Take the smallest amount that works to relieve your pain.
2. Do not use it for a long time. If you need it for more than a few days, ask your doctor.
3. Take it with food. This helps protect your stomach.
4. Do not mix it with alcohol or other anti-inflammatory drugs. Combining them can increase side effects.
5. Pay attention to how the medication interacts with others. If you take other medication, check with a doctor to avoid problems.

6.4. When to seek medical advice?

Although you can buy ibuprofen without a prescription, you should consult your doctor for other options if:

1. You have stomach ulcers, kidney disease or heart problems.
2. You are taking blood thinners or other medicines that may interact with anti-inflammatory drugs.
3. You have had persistent side effects such as stomach pain, black stools, or shortness of breath.



Takeaway messages:

Ibuprofen can be useful when used correctly, but there are risks to be aware of. Just because it is available without a prescription does not mean it is harmless. Always read the label, stick to the recommended doses and, if you are not sure, ask a doctor!

7. Should you rely on social media for pain management advice?

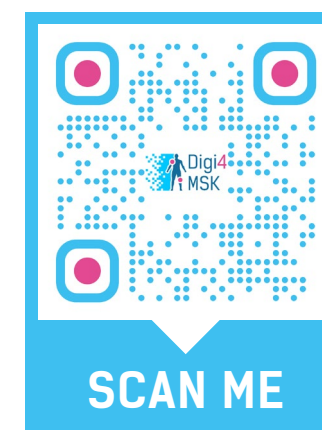
Daniel, 35, had been working from home since the pandemic began. After months hunched over his laptop, a nagging pain appeared in his right shoulder. Searching for answers, he opened his favourite social media app and typed ‘*shoulder pain courses*’.

Within minutes, he was flooded with videos. One influencer claimed the pain came from a “*short upper trapezius muscle*.” Another insisted it was an “*elevated shoulder caused by emotional stress*.” A third warned about “*visceral tension from the liver referring pain to the shoulder*.” Others talked about “*fascia stuck to the ribs*” and promoted devices or massages to “release” it.

Daniel tried several of the suggested routines—pressing a tennis ball under his shoulder, stretching the “short” muscles, even following a detox recipe “to reduce inflammation.” Some days it seemed to help; others it made things worse.

When the pain spread down his arm, he told a colleague, who happened to be a physiotherapist. She listened and asked, “*Did any of those people explain how they know what’s happening inside your shoulder?*” He paused. None of them had. Their videos were confident but vague—no context.

That evening, Daniel watched the same videos again but saw them differently. The bold claims now sounded less like science and more like marketing. He decided it was time to get real advice from someone qualified.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Identifying unverified or misleading explanations often spread on social media.
- Learning how to check who is behind online health content and what evidence supports it.
- Knowing where to find trustworthy information for understanding and managing shoulder pain.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/ICSfkm1LZrU>

7.1. What is the problem with social media health advice?

Not all social media advice is backed up by science and there is no standard or ethical board that approves advice on social media. Therefore, you should always consider the risk that advice may be inaccurate, unhelpful or even dangerous.

1. Social media lacks proof and scientific accuracy because anyone can post personal content that can be misleading or false.
2. It is often based on personal experience. What works for one person's pain may not work for another.
3. Some are used to promote pain treatments without scientific evidence. Many posts are aimed at selling products or exercise-based methods, disguising their commercial purposes. A classic trick is to have you do a test or questionnaire and afterwards tell you what you "need" to become healthy. Most of these tests are unable to detect relevant changes or identify problems in individuals. The tests that are reliable should be used by your healthcare provider who also knows the rest of your story and understands what you want to achieve.
4. Pain management should be personalised, as it is a personal experience. Avoid "one-size-fits-all" solutions!

7.2. How to identify reliable pain management information online?

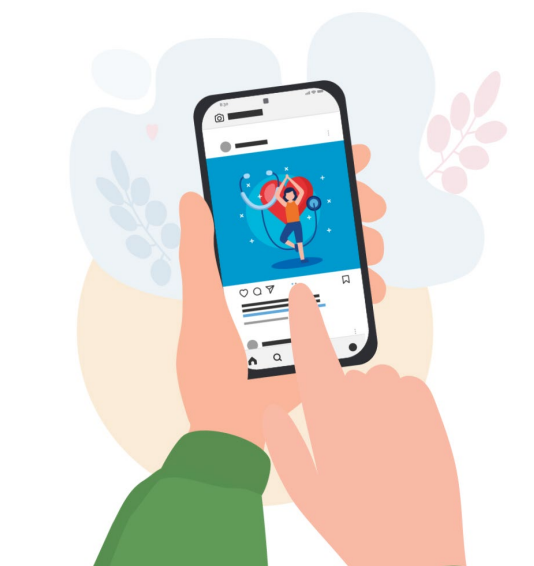
To avoid misinformation, keep these tips in mind when seeking health advice on the internet about pain management:

1. Verify that the information comes from an independent and authorised healthcare professional, a research body or government health agency.
2. See if the information on pain management is accompanied by links to scientific studies and if they align with national or international guidelines published by accredited or governmental agencies.
3. Be critical if something sounds too good to be true!
4. Before following advice, you can consult your trusted healthcare professional specialized in pain.

7.3. Where to find trustworthy pain management advice?

In addition to using social media sites that are trusted and verified by your healthcare professional, you can try other trusted sources:

1. Government health websites: organizations like the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention provide reliable information.
2. Medical institutions: the websites from hospitals, universities, and research centres have good insights. For example, World Health Organization has useful information about different types of pain.
3. Licensed healthcare professionals: doctors, physical therapists, and pain specialists can give you personalized and accurate advice.



Takeaway messages:

Social media can be a place to learn, but it should not be your main source of pain management information. Check information with trusted sources and always talk to a healthcare professional before making decisions related to your health. By thinking carefully and getting advice from people you trust, you can manage your pain safely and effectively!



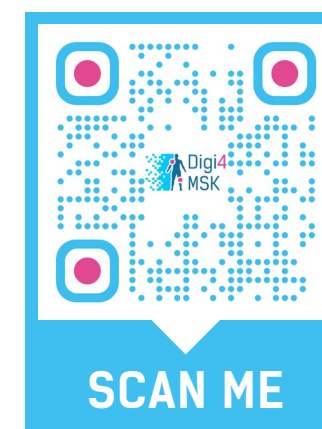
8. New pain as you get older? Here is when to see your healthcare professional (and when not to)!

Elvira, 69, had always considered herself healthy. She enjoyed long walks, volunteering at the library, and gardening on weekends. Over the past few years, though, she began to notice small, nagging pains that came and went—one week in her hands, the next in her knees or shoulders. Nothing severe, but enough to make her wonder if something was *'wearing out'*.

At first, she ignored it. Then, after reading online that "joint pain after sixty means degeneration," she grew uneasy. The idea that her body was slowly breaking down made her anxious. She started avoiding certain chores, gave up carrying groceries, and even reduced her walks *'to protect her joints'*.

Her general practitioner listened to her story and performed a check-up. Everything looked normal for her age—no swelling, no inflammation, no alarming signs. *"Your body has lived a lot"* the doctor said kindly, *"but you're still strong"*. Elvira nodded, though she was not sure what to make of it. If nothing was seriously wrong, why did her body ache more than before?

At home that evening, she reflected: the pains were not constant, they did not stop her from sleeping, and they often faded when she stayed active. Maybe her body was simply changing—not breaking. Still, she wanted to know how to tell the difference between natural age-related discomfort and something that truly needed attention.



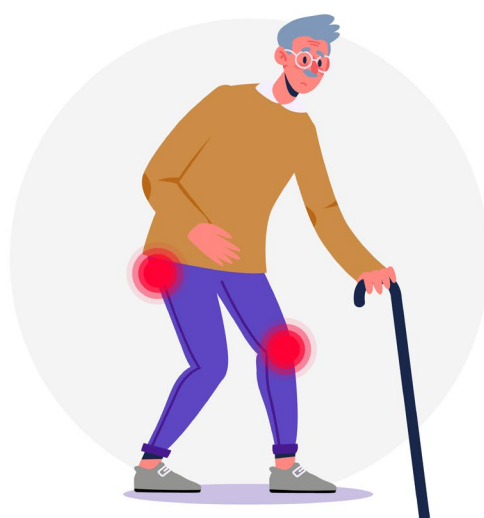
Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding the difference between normal age-related aches and signs that require medical assessment.
- Recognizing how mild, shifting pain patterns often reflect sensitivity or stiffness rather than disease.
- Learning when to monitor symptoms and when it is time to consult a healthcare professional.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/mQG2Ku7uo84>

8.1. Does every new ache really mean you need a visit to a healthcare professional?

1. **Your body shows “wear and tear”—it is normal!** The term “wear and tear” has frequently been used as a stand in for normal age-related changes. Just like our skin gets wrinkles, our bodies also show signs of aging inside. X-rays and MRIs often show wear and tear like arthritis or disc changes as we get older. Many people with these changes feel absolutely no pain! So, a new ache does not automatically mean something is “broken” or needs immediate fixing. It is often just your body adapting.
2. **Pain is complex, not just damage:** Pain is not just about what is happening in your joints or muscles. It can be influenced by many things: your stress levels, how well you sleep, your mood, and how much you move. These factors often play a bigger role in your pain than a specific “problem” that a test might find.
3. **Preventing unnecessary tests and worries:** If every ache led to a healthcare professional’s visit and tests, we would all be living in hospitals! For common mild aches that are not severe or accompanied by worrying signs, too many tests can cause unnecessary worry, expose you to unnecessary treatments, and cost money without actually changing the best way to help you feel better.
4. **You have the power over your pain:** Many common aches and pains, even as you get older, respond incredibly well to things you can do yourself. This includes gentle movement, specific exercises, pacing your activities, and managing stress. These active steps are often the most powerful tools for long-term comfort and for keeping you active.



8.2. When should you see a healthcare professional?

While not every ache means a trip to the healthcare professional, there are definitely times when you should seek medical advice. It is important to look out for the following symptoms:

1. **Sudden, severe pain** that came on for no clear reason.
2. Pain that does not get better with rest or mild activity, or pain that **gets worse very quickly**.
3. Pain after a **significant fall or injury**.
4. Pain that wakes you up at night, or **increases gradually over days or weeks**.
5. Pain accompanied by other worrying symptoms like **unexplained weight loss, fever, chills, gradually increasing weakness, numbness, or tingling** in your arms or legs, or problems with bladder or bowel control.
6. If your pain **limits your daily activities** and does not improve with your usual self-care strategies in approximately 3 months.
7. If you have a **history of cancer or other serious health conditions** that might make certain pains more concerning.
8. If you have a generalised feeling of malaise or feeling notably unwell.

Takeaway messages:

Do not ignore new pain, but also do not panic. Your body is resilient. For common aches, focusing on movement and self-management is often best. For worrying symptoms or pain that significantly impacts your life, your healthcare professional is your best partner in understanding it and finding the right path forward for your health and well-being.

9. Can your culture affect how you feel or manage pain?



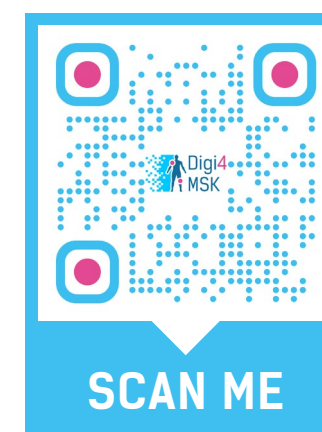
Amina, 54, moved from Morocco to Denmark more than twenty years ago. She works as a home caregiver and spends long hours helping older patients dress and move. Lately, her own lower back has been bothering her. She often wakes with stiffness that eases as the day goes on.

At work, she hides it. *"I'm fine"*, she tells her colleagues when they ask, smiling through the discomfort. In her family, pain has always been something to endure quietly. Growing up, she was taught that complaining means weakness—and that strong people do not burden others with their pain.

When the pain worsened after a busy month, her daughter insisted she see a doctor. Amina hesitated. *"What if they think I'm exaggerating?"*, she said, *"Back home, people just keep going"*. At the clinic, she struggled to explain exactly how it felt. The doctor spoke kindly but quickly, using words she did not fully understand. She nodded anyway, afraid of seeming impolite.

That evening, she talked with a friend from her community who had similar pain but described a very different approach: *"In my country, people talk about pain openly—it's normal to ask for help"*. Amina realized that how she spoke about pain was not just personal—it was part of her culture.

For the first time, she began to wonder how beliefs, upbringing, and language shape the way people express and manage pain.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how cultural beliefs and traditions influence the way people interpret and express pain.
- Recognizing that communication styles and expectations about pain differ across cultures.
- Learning how to talk about pain openly with healthcare professionals to get the right support.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/dRZ4ZLV03j4>

9.1. Why do your beliefs and traditions matter in managing pain?

People's beliefs and traditions can affect how they manage pain in many ways. For example:

- **What you believe causes pain:** In your culture, you might believe pain comes from aging, certain foods, or even spiritual reasons. These beliefs shape how you interpret and experience your own pain.
- **How you express pain:** Some traditions teach people to be quiet and strong when in pain, while others encourage showing it openly. Remember that no one can know exactly how you feel, and it takes practice to explain it so that others understand it. But once you learn to communicate how pain affects you, others can start to play a more active role in helping you.
- **How you cope with pain:** You may have traditional ways of dealing with pain, like using specific home remedies, family practices, or visiting traditional healers. However, it is beneficial for you to seek second opinions provided by healthcare professionals.
- **If you seek help and when you seek it:** Your traditions might influence whether you believe it is right to see a healthcare professional for pain, or if it is something you should just endure. If you experience that your healthcare professional does not understand you, try to talk about why you believe your behaviour is helpful and ask why their advice can be useful.

Because of these differences, sometimes healthcare professionals might not fully understand what you are going through, or the advice they give might not perfectly fit your way of life. Your healthcare professional wants to respect your background and work with you.



9.2. How to talk about your pain with your healthcare professional and share your beliefs?

1. **Be open about what you are feeling:** Tell your healthcare professional about your pain, and how it affects your daily life. Do not hide or minimize your pain, even if your tradition encourages stoicism. Your healthcare professional needs an honest picture of your discomfort to offer the best care and support.
2. **Share your beliefs and traditions about pain:** This is very important. Tell your healthcare professional what you believe is causing your pain, or what you have learned from your family or community about it. For example, "In my culture, we believe back pain is normal when you get older," or "My family uses this herb for headaches." This helps your healthcare professional to get a better understanding of your perspective.
3. **Describe how you usually cope:** Explain the methods you have tried or usually use to deal with pain, whether they are traditional practices, home remedies, or just your everyday approach. Sharing this helps your healthcare professional understand your coping style and suggest treatments that align with it.
4. **Ask questions and share your preferences:** Your healthcare professional wants to work *with* you to find the best way to manage your pain. If a suggested treatment does not align with your beliefs or traditions, please say so. Ask questions and discuss your concerns openly. Your preferences are crucial for creating a plan that truly fits your life and values.

Takeaway messages:

It is completely natural for people from different backgrounds to have different beliefs about pain and health. Your healthcare professional's goal is to help you feel better and they respect your individual story. By openly sharing your beliefs and traditions about pain, you help your healthcare professional provide the most effective and respectful care for you.

10. Is it safe to keep moving when you are in pain?



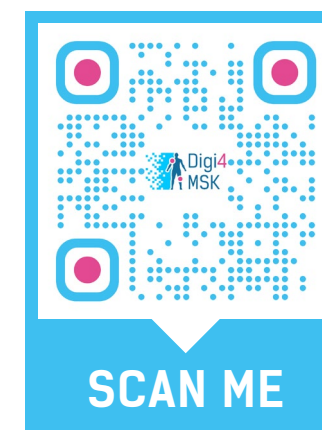
Thomas, 61, had been a postman for most of his life. He was used to walking long distances every day, but lately his lower back and hips had started aching after long routes. At first, he thought it was just fatigue. Then the pain began showing up even on weekends, when he was resting.

He grew worried and cut down his walks, spending more time on the sofa. Strangely, the more he rested, the stiffer he felt. His legs felt heavy in the morning, and he needed extra time to get going. *"Maybe I'm doing more harm by moving"* he told his wife, *"better to let things settle"*.

One day, while chatting with his neighbour, a retired nurse, he mentioned that even light gardening now made him sore. She listened and asked, *"Does it hurt more after you move, or mostly while you're doing it?"* Thomas thought about it. The discomfort usually faded once he got going, and the next day was not any worse.

The nurse smiled. *"That's a good sign"* she said. *"If the pain doesn't flare up afterwards, your body's likely coping fine. Some mild pain during activity isn't dangerous—it just means the tissues are working. But if the pain stays stronger for a day or two after, then maybe the load was too much, and you can adjust next time."*

Her words stayed with him. Maybe pain was not always a warning to stop, but a signal to pace himself. That evening, Thomas looked out at his garden and thought about giving it another gentle try.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding that mild pain during activity can be safe and part of recovery.
- Recognizing that a strong or lasting increase in pain after 24–48 hours may indicate the activity was too intense.
- Learning how to monitor pain behaviour and adjust exercise levels to stay active safely.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/fpuX54YQen4>

10.1. Why does moving help (even when you have pain)?

You might believe that if something hurts, you should stop doing it completely, especially with pain. But for long-lasting (chronic) pain, this normally is not true.

1. **Pain does not always mean damage:** Imagine your body's pain system like a sensitive car alarm. Sometimes, after an injury, this alarm stays extra sensitive, even after the injury is healed. So you might feel pain, but it does not mean you are causing more harm or damage to your body by moving.
2. **Moving is healthy:** Even though exercise might make your pain or discomfort feel a bit worse at first, over time this will get better and is key to getting back to living your life.
3. **Avoiding movement can make pain worse:** If you avoid moving because of fear, your muscles can get weaker, and your body can actually become *more* sensitive to pain over time. Starting to move gradually helps breaking this cycle.



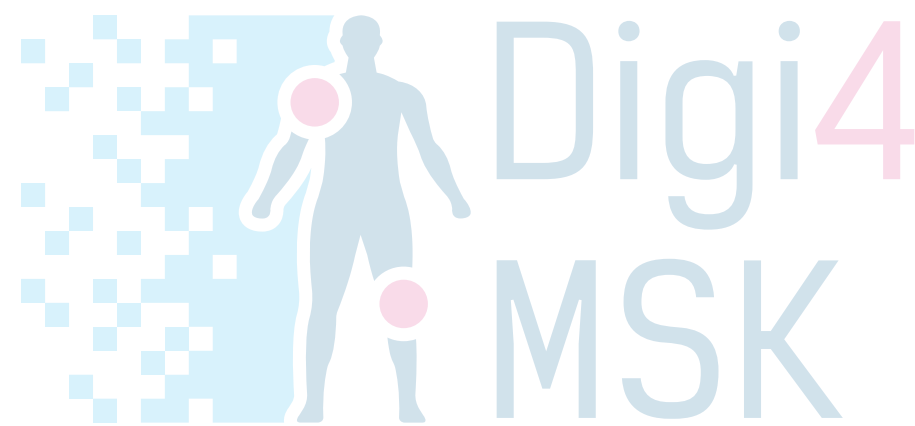
10.2. How to start and keep moving safely?

1. **Start small and increase gradually:** Begin with an amount of activity that feels comfortable, even if it seems too easy. For example, just walk for 5 minutes, or lift a very light object a few times. The key is to start easy, and gradually increase the amount over time.
2. **Pace yourself:** Do not try to do too much on your good days, only to crash and do nothing on bad days. Try to keep your activity levels manageable every day.
3. **Understand “sore but safe”:** It is important to know the difference between pain that indicates harm and pain that is just your body getting used to movement. When you start a new exercise routine or do physical tasks you have not done in a while, it is completely normal to feel some muscle soreness and stiffness in the days that follow. This is known as delayed onset muscle soreness, or DOMS. It is a natural response as your muscles adapt to new demands. The good news? Your body is amazing at adjusting. As you continue to stay active, this soreness will lessen, and you will likely feel much less discomfort the next time—unless you take a long break again.
4. **Stop if you** feel sharp, new, or rapidly increasing pain. Think of it like a traffic light:
 - **Green** means go, no pain.
 - **Yellow** means mild, familiar discomfort, proceed with some caution.
 - **Red** means stop if you feel sharp or increasing pain.

Takeaway messages:

You are key to your recovery; every small step you take towards moving more is a powerful effort. Moving with pain is not about pushing through agony, but about taking **smart, gentle steps forward**. Do not hesitate to share any concerns or difficulties with your healthcare professional; they are there to support you in regaining confidence and improving your quality of life, guiding you towards a more active and comfortable life.

11. Can online consultations be as effective as in-person visits for treating pain?



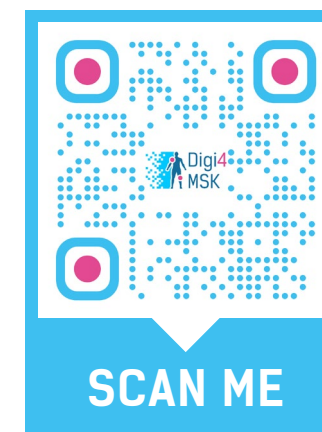
Carla, 46, works as a teacher in a small town. After a period of intense stress and long hours sitting at her desk, she began to feel a burning sensation between her shoulder blades. With the nearest physiotherapy clinic more than an hour away, she hesitated to book an appointment. When her doctor suggested an online consultation, she was not convinced. *"How could someone help me without even touching me?"* she thought.

A week later, after another sleepless night, she gave it a try. The physiotherapist greeted her on video, asked detailed questions about her pain, daily habits, and workspace, and asked her to perform a few gentle movements while observing through the camera. Carla was surprised at how precisely he described what might be aggravating her pain.

He showed her how to get comfortable at her desk and asked her to demonstrate a few stretches. *"You'll do these on your own, but I'll check in next week"*, he said. Over the next days, Carla followed the plan carefully, writing down how she felt after each session.

During their next call, they compared notes and adapted the exercises. *"It feels strange"*, she admitted, *"but it actually works"*. She realized that what mattered most was not distance, but clear guidance, feedback, and her own participation.

That evening, as her shoulders finally began to relax, Carla thought that perhaps care could travel through a screen—when both sides stayed engaged.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding when accessing to online consultations can safely and effectively support pain management.
- Recognizing what aspects of care—communication, assessment, feedback—can work remotely.
- Learning how to prepare and participate actively in an online session for the best results.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/9Lv2NejblK4>

11.1. How can online consultations help with pain?

Through video calls or chat, healthcare providers can:

1. Check your symptoms by talking about your pain history and triggers.
2. Adapt their physical assessment to an online format. For example, mobility and other tests can be performed from home with online supervision!
3. Provide medical and health advice like lifestyle changes, or exercises.
4. Guide self-management strategies, promote movement, and support daily pain relief. However, healthcare providers will refer to in-person care when thorough physical exams or specific treatments are required.

11.2. What are the benefits of telehealth for pain treatment?

1. **Convenience & accessibility.** No travel needed, ideal for people who have trouble moving or live far from healthcare centres.
2. **Ongoing support.** Easy check-in if necessary.
3. **Specialist access.** It allows consultations with experts who may not be available locally.
4. **Flexible access.** It allows scheduling at a convenient time and place.



11.3. What are the challenges of online consultations?

1. **Technology barriers.** Some people, especially older adults, may struggle with video calls.
2. **Physical exams needed.** In certain cases, healthcare providers need to see you in person.
3. **Connection issues.** Internet connectivity problems can affect consultation quality.
4. **Communication issues.** If they are non native speakers, or have hearing or cognitive challenges.

11.4. When to seek an in-person visit?

Online consultations are effective for many, but in-person care is needed if:

1. Pain is severe or worsening.
2. Imaging or hands-on treatment is required.
3. Serious symptoms appear (for instance fever, numbness, loss of strength or sudden weight loss).
4. Interventions like injections or manual therapy are indicated.
5. It is recommended by your healthcare professional.

Takeaway messages:

Online consultations can often be just as effective as in-person visits for treating pain, particularly for education, physical activity or exercise, and supporting self-management. However, some people face challenges with technology, and certain conditions require in-person care. Nonetheless, remember that your healthcare professional can also use simpler methods for reviews, such as instant messaging.

12. Can mental health support help with pain management?



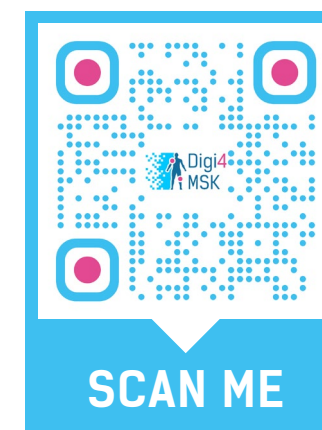
Charlotte, 39, was in a car accident almost two years ago. It was not severe—no broken bones, no major injuries—but her neck had snapped forward sharply. The doctors called it “*whiplash*”. They told her the pain would probably ease within weeks.

It did not. Months turned into years, and the pain in her neck and shoulders never fully went away. It moved around—sometimes a dull stiffness, sometimes a sharp twinge when she turned her head quickly. She had had every test and scan available, all showing normal results. “*Nothing serious*” they said. Yet the pain remained real, persistent, and exhausting.

Over time, other things changed too. She startled easily at loud noises, avoided driving at night, and often woke from restless sleep. Even minor stress at work made her muscles tighten. Her friends started saying she looked tense all the time. Charlotte wondered if she had simply become fragile.

During a review appointment, her physiotherapist asked about the accident and how she had been coping emotionally. When Charlotte mentioned the nightmares and the anxiety she still felt when passing the crash site, the physiotherapist suggested seeing a psychologist who worked with post-trauma patients.

In therapy, Charlotte began to see how her nervous system had stayed in “*alert mode*”, long after her tissues had healed. The tension, the shallow breathing, the fear of re-injury—all were keeping her body from calming down. Understanding that link did not make her pain ‘*psychological*’. It simply showed how closely body and mind stay connected after trauma.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how biological, emotional, and social factors interact in long-term recovery in chronic pain such as in whiplash.
- Recognizing that persistent pain can involve physical sensitivity maintained by stress or trauma, not imagined pain.
- Learning how and when to access mental health and rehabilitation professionals as part of pain management.
- Building confidence to discuss emotional symptoms openly with healthcare providers to receive coordinated care.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/li8x8n5RLqM>

12.1. How are mental health and pain connected?

Pain and mental health are closely linked. Conditions like anxiety, depression, and stress can contribute to:

1. Make your body more sensitive. Emotional distress can amplify nerves' signals to the brain and the impact of these signals in daily activities.
2. Two. Decrease the capacity for dealing with pain. Feeling overwhelmed can make pain feel harder to manage.
3. Reduce motivation for movement. Fear of pain can lead to inactivity, making symptoms worse.
4. Disrupt sleep. Poor sleep increases pain perception and affects overall well-being.

12.2. What are some mental health strategies for pain management?

1. **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** can help you reframe negative thoughts about pain and behaviour, reducing distress.
2. **Mindfulness & relaxation.** Techniques like meditation and deep and slow breathing can help calm the nervous system.
3. **Support groups & counselling.** Talking to professionals or peers can make you feel less lonely in your experience of pain and give you strategies to deal with your pain.
4. Finding **healthy ways to manage stress**, like hobbies, exercise, or social activities, can help you handle pain better.

12.3. When to Seek Mental Health Support?

If pain is affecting your mood, relationships, or daily life, seeking mental health support can help. Consider professional help if:

1. Pain is leading to persistent sadness, anxiety, or frustration.
2. You feel isolated or unsupported in managing pain.
3. You are avoiding movement due to aspects such as fear of worsening pain or a strong lack of motivation.
4. You have thoughts of harming yourself or feel unable to keep yourself safe

Takeaway messages:

Pain is not just physical. It affects mental and emotional well-being too. Mental health support, including therapy, stress management, and social support, can help you deal with pain, reducing its negative impact.

Seeking help is a sign of strength, and with the right tools, you can regain control of your pain. If you are struggling with pain, consider speaking with a mental health professional or joining a support group to find effective coping strategies.



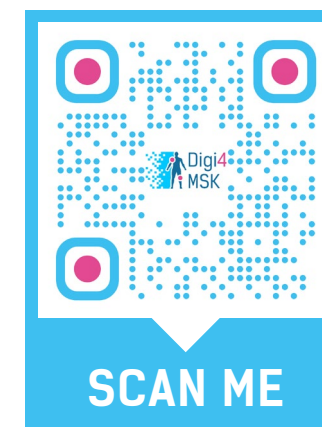
13. Can online resources help with pain management?

Hannah, 52, had been living with neck and shoulder pain for several years. Between her office job and caring for her elderly mother, she found it hard to attend regular appointments. One evening, she searched *"how to manage chronic pain at home"* on her tablet. Instantly, hundreds of results appeared—videos, blogs, and apps promising relief.

At first, she felt hopeful. She downloaded a few programs, followed online stretches, and joined a forum where people shared their experiences. Some advice helped her move more and relax, but much of it was confusing. One influencer claimed that pain meant *"toxins in the body"*, another that she needed to *"reset her posture with magnets"*. The more she read, the harder it became to tell what was real.

During a phone appointment, her family doctor asked what she had tried. When Hannah explained, the doctor nodded. *"It's great you're looking for ways to help yourself"*, she said, *"but it's important to check who made the information. You can trust information from hospitals, universities, or public health agencies—not people trying to sell something"*.

That night, Hannah looked again. She started checking if websites showed who wrote the contents and whether they mentioned real professionals. Slowly, the online world felt clearer—less confusing, more useful.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to judge whether online health information is trustworthy or misleading.
- Understanding what reliable sources look like and how to spot red flags such as miracle claims or hidden sales.
- Becoming more confident in deciding which online advice is worth following and which to ignore.
- Knowing how to use digital resources to support—not replace—professional guidance.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/x9RoRDcGISI>

13.1. How can online resources help?

The internet provides access to tools for managing pain. These include:

1. Educational reports & videos. If you know more about pain science, you can avoid fear and learn how to deal with pain better.
2. Exercise guides. Many websites and apps offer exercises that are backed by science to help you move more easily and feel less stiff.
3. Self-assessment tools. Some online tools let you check your symptoms and track your pain.
4. Support communities. Online forums and peer support groups can be a good source of emotional support and shared experiences.
5. Relaxation & mindfulness. Apps with meditation, breathing exercises, and stress management techniques can help you feel less pain.



13.2. How to choose reliable online resources?

Online tools can be a great help for managing pain because they are handy and often teach proven ways to cope. But it is key to pick the right ones. Here is how:

1. Who made it? Is it real science?

- **Look for experts:** Check if doctors, therapists, or big hospitals created it.
- **Is it proven?** Does it say it uses methods like “CBT” (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or “mindfulness” that research shows work? Skip “magic cures.”

2. Does it help you to do things? Is it easy?

- **Make sure it offers tools, not just reading:** Look for trackers, guided exercises, or meditations that help you do something.
- **Simple to use:** Try it out. If it is confusing, you will not use it.

3. Are they honest? Is your info safe?

- **Make sure there are no hidden sales:** Be careful if they are mostly trying to sell a product. Good resources are open about who pays for them.
- **Protect your data:** If you sign up, check if your info is safe (look for “https://” and a padlock).

4. Does it offer help, but not a panacea?

- **Make sure it works with your healthcare professional:** A good online tool supports your current treatment; it does not replace your healthcare professional. Be wary if it claims you will not need any other help anymore.

13.3. When to combine online resources with professional care?

Online tools can help you, but they should add to professionals’ advice, not replace it. See a healthcare provider if:

1. Your pain persists or gets worse despite self-management.
2. You notice new and unexplained symptoms.
3. You need personalized treatment beyond general recommendations.

Takeaway messages:

Online resources can be really helpful for dealing with pain, learning about your condition or supporting you to get moving. But make sure to use trusted sources, and get professional advice if you are not sure if it is right for you.

Look for tips on how to handle pain, and try medical websites and digital tools to help you stay healthy.

14. Are scans always needed when you have pain?

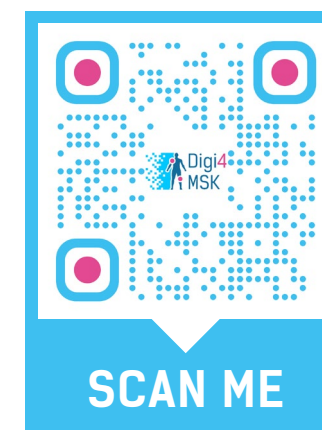
Michael, 50, woke up one morning with sharp pain in his lower back after cleaning the garage. He had not fallen or lifted anything heavy, but the pain felt worrying. *"Maybe I slipped a disc"*, he thought. After a few days, it still hurt, especially when sitting, and he decided to see his doctor.

During the visit, Michael asked directly for an MRI. *"I just want to see what's wrong"*, he said. The doctor listened carefully and explained that, in most cases, scans do not change how back pain is treated—especially when there are no warning signs like fever, numbness, or unexplained weakness. *"But what if it's something serious?"*, Michael insisted.

To reassure him, the doctor described how many people without pain have similar scan results—disc bulges, wear and tear, or age-related changes. *"They sound worrying"*, she said, *"but they're often normal findings, like wrinkles on the inside"*. She suggested waiting a few weeks while he stayed active and monitored his symptoms.

At first, Michael felt uneasy. If the pain was real, how could the scan not help? Yet, as the days passed, the pain began to fade. He realized that understanding what scans can and cannot show was part of making sense of his condition—not ignoring it.

A month later, he felt much better without ever needing imaging. The relief came not from a picture, but from clearer information.



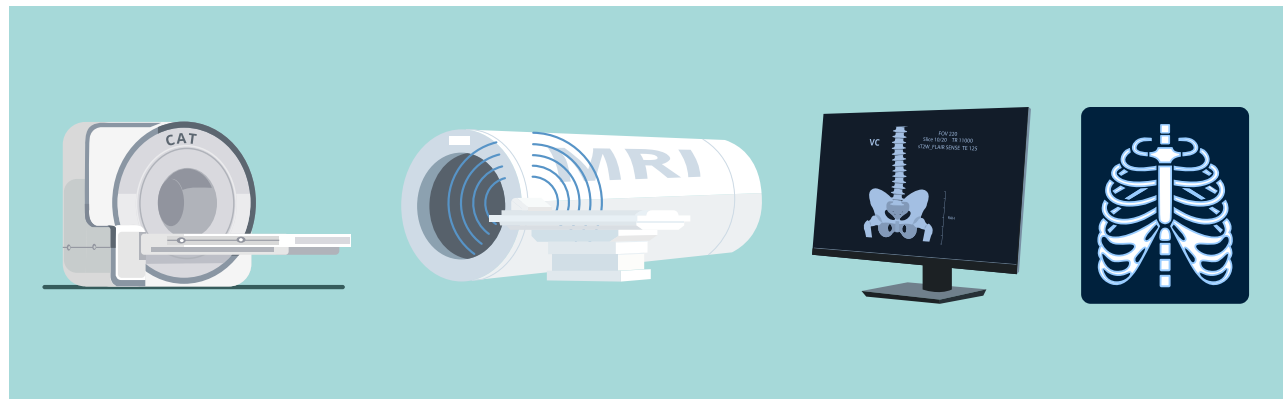
Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to decide when a scan is truly useful and when it may not change treatment.
- Understanding that common scan results, like "disc degeneration" or "wear and tear," can appear even in people without pain.
- Recognizing the importance of discussing options with your healthcare professional before requesting tests.
- Feeling more confident to question and interpret medical information so it makes sense for your situation.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/xZj04gty-VM>

14.1. Why might an MRI or X-ray not be needed right away?

1. **“Normal” findings are common, even without pain:** Did you know that many things seen on scans, like disc bulges in your back or degenerative changes, are actually found in lots of people who have **no pain at all**? For example, studies show that by age 50, about 8 out of 10 people without back pain still have some age-related changes on an MRI. This means those findings are often just normal signs of aging, not the cause of your pain.
2. **Scans do not speed up recovery for most common pain:** For recent back or neck pain that does not have serious signs or that severely impacts your life, getting a scan early on does not make you recover any faster, but it does increase the risk of slowing your progress back to normal activities such as work.
3. **Unnecessary scans can lead to unnecessary steps:** Sometimes a scan will identify something like a disc bulge, which is a normal finding, even in people without pain. Unfortunately, such normal findings on a scan can sometimes lead to more tests, specialist visits, injections, or even surgeries that you do not really need. This adds to your frustration, and medical bills, without actually helping your pain.
4. **Seeing a scan can make you worry more:** Sometimes, seeing a scan with common and harmless findings can actually make you feel more worried or anxious about your body. This extra worry can actually make your pain feel worse.



14.2. What might your doctor tell you (and why might they not order a scan)?

Imagine you are talking to your doctor about new back pain. Here is what they might say and why:

“I understand why you’re thinking about an MRI, as many people do. It’s natural to want to ‘see’ what’s going on inside. However, for your kind of back pain, which just started and doesn’t have any serious warning signs, we do not recommend a scan.”

The main reason is that for most common pains like yours, the pain will disappear in a few weeks. Also, scans often show things that are common even in people who have no pain. So, seeing something like that on a scan might just make you worry more, even if it’s not truly causing your current pain.

My goal is to help you get better safely and effectively, and for now, that means focusing on staying active and using simple pain relief, rather than jumping straight to a scan that might cause more worry than help.

We’ll keep things under review, and if anything changes, we can revisit whether a scan would be helpful.”

Takeaway messages:

If you have an episode of back or neck pain, you do not always need a scan as a rule of thumb. **If you are in doubt, you should consult your doctor, who will know how to reassure you or when to send you to a scan.**

15. Is it important to be part of decisions about your pain treatment?

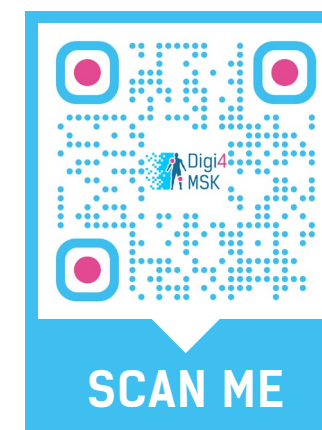
Pauline, 57, had lived with knee pain for several years. At first, her doctor prescribed medication, then physiotherapy, and finally suggested she might consider surgery someday. Each appointment felt quick—she listened, nodded, and followed instructions without asking much. Still, the pain kept returning, and she often wondered if the treatments matched what she actually needed.

One morning, her new physiotherapist asked, *“What would you like to be able to do if your pain improved?”*, Pauline hesitated. No one had ever asked that before. *“I’d like to walk with my grandchildren without worrying about stairs”*, she said. The therapist smiled. *“Then let’s plan around that”*.

They reviewed options together—specific exercises, pacing strategies, and lifestyle changes—discussing what felt realistic for her schedule and confidence. For the first time, Pauline felt like a partner in her own care, not just a patient receiving orders.

Later, during her next doctor’s visit, she explained what was working and what she hoped to keep improving. The doctor listened and adjusted her plan accordingly. Pauline left the office lighter, realizing that treatment worked best when she was part of the decisions.

It was not about rejecting professional advice—it was about bringing her voice into the conversation.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to take an active role in making decisions about your pain care.
- Understanding that your goals, preferences, and daily life matter when choosing treatments.
- Knowing how to ask questions and share opinions respectfully with healthcare professionals.
- Feeling more confident in applying information from different sources to choose what works best for you.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/svGOA-QqnwU>

15.1. How can you be an active partner in your pain treatment through shared decisions?

1. **Better consequences for you:** When you are involved in choosing your treatment, studies show you will likely feel more informed, less stressed about your choices, and ultimately more satisfied with your care.
2. **More likely to stick with it:** If you are a part of choosing your treatment plan (like an exercise program or lifestyle changes), you are more likely to understand it and stick with it. This makes it more successful in the long run.
3. **Smarter healthcare choices:** Being part of the decision can help you choose treatments that truly fit your life and values, potentially avoiding unnecessary or expensive procedures you do not really want or need.
4. **Feel more in control:** When you have a say in your health decisions, you feel more in charge of your own journey. This can make you feel more confident in managing your pain.

15.2. How can you and your healthcare professional decide together?

1. **Talk about what matters to YOU:** Your life, your goals, and your worries are very important. Tell your healthcare professional what is most important to you right now or what worries you most about these options (for example avoiding surgery, needing quick pain relief for work or wanting to keep up a hobby).
2. **Understand your options clearly:** Your healthcare professional should explain all the different ways to treat your pain—like exercises, medications, online programs, or injections. They should tell you the pros and cons for each one, using words you understand, not medical jargon.
3. **Make sure you “get it” and ask everything:** Do not be shy! Ask your healthcare professional about any information that is unclear or insufficient, but relevant to you. It is fine to take time to think, talk to family, or even get a second opinion.
4. **Choose together. No pressure:** You should feel like you have enough time to think about your choices. Your healthcare professional will not pressure you. The goal is not one “right” answer, but the **best decision for you**. Your healthcare professional’s job is to guide and inform you, not to tell you what to do.



Takeaway messages:

Taking an active role in managing your musculoskeletal pain is powerful. By actively participating in choosing your treatment plan with your healthcare team, you build trust, ensure the care fits your life, and ultimately achieve better results for your health and well-being. This collaborative approach respects patient values, builds trust, and ultimately leads to more personalized and successful care journeys.



16. Why do your actions matter in long-term pain management?

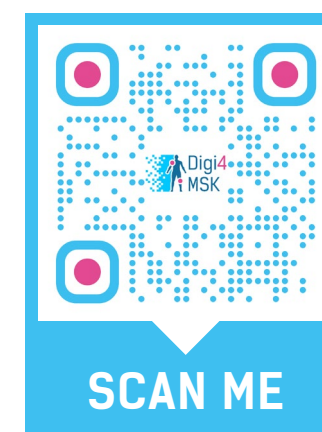
Lars, 48, had been struggling with back pain for almost a decade. He had tried everything—painkillers, massages, injections, even several rounds of physiotherapy. Each treatment helped for a short while, but the pain always crept back. *“Nothing works”*, he often said.

His last doctor’s visit felt different. Instead of suggesting another procedure, the physician asked, *“What do you do between treatments?”*. Lars looked puzzled. *“I wait for the pain to calm down”*. The doctor nodded. *“That’s part of the problem. Long-term improvement often depends on what you do—how you move, rest, manage stress, and keep active.”*

At first, Lars felt frustrated. It sounded like too much responsibility. But as the weeks went on, he noticed a pattern: the days he walked, stretched, and followed his sleep routine, his pain was milder. On weeks when he skipped activity and spent more time worrying, everything hurt more.

During a follow-up video consultation, his physiotherapist helped him set small, realistic goals—ten minutes of walking each morning, short breaks at work, and gentle exercise before bed. *“It’s not about fixing it all at once”*, she said, *“but about building habits that keep your body and mind steady.”*

Over time, Lars began to see that pain management was not just treatment—it was practice. His actions did not erase pain overnight, but they changed how much space it took in his life.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding that your own daily actions—movement, rest, sleep, and habits—play a major role in long-term pain management.
- Learning how to turn professional advice into small, practical routines that fit your life.
- Recognizing that self-management builds control and confidence, even when pain persists.
- Feeling empowered to take consistent steps that make professional treatments more effective.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/83eF2KTvsFs>

16.1. Why is your active role key for long-term pain management?

1. **Passive treatments are often temporary:** Pills can reduce pain, and injections can reduce inflammation, but they usually do not fix persistent pain or teach you how to manage your pain beyond the immediate effect. Think of them as tools to help in the short term, not the entire solution. To truly live better with pain, you need to be actively involved.
2. **You build lasting strength and skills:** Actively engaging in things like exercise, everyday movement, or social activities helps you build physical strength and feel better. But crucially, it also helps you develop vital **skills** for managing pain. These are fundamental changes that can reduce the negative impact of pain over time and build resilience against future flare-ups.
3. **You learn to cope better, reducing pain's impact and improving health:** Your body is incredibly adaptable. Active self-management strategies—like learning to pace yourself, stress management techniques, and understanding your pain better—can actually re-train your nervous system.
4. **You gain control and confidence:** When you actively participate in your treatment and learn specific self-management skills, you discover what works for your body and pain. This makes you feel more in control and confident in facing daily challenges, which is a huge part of living better with chronic pain. You become the expert on your own pain journey.



16.2. What does “actively doing” look like?

1. **Consistent movement and exercise:** Even when it is hard, finding ways to move regularly is essential. It builds physical resilience, improves your mood, and is vital for your overall health, even despite your pain. This could be walks, stretches, specific exercises from a therapist, or activities like yoga or tai chi. And if these activities are done in group, that is even better!
2. **Pacing yourself:** This is a key skill. It means learning to balance activity and rest to avoid pushing too hard and causing flare-ups. You learn to plan your day, so you can do more over time without exhausting yourself.
3. **Stress management and problem solving:** Stress can significantly worsen pain. Learning skills like deep breathing, mindfulness, or relaxation techniques can help calm your nervous system and reduce pain intensity.
4. **Prioritizing sleep:** Poor sleep makes pain worse. Developing good sleep habits is a vital self-management skill that directly impacts your energy levels and pain sensitivity.
5. **Healthy lifestyle choices:** Eating well, staying hydrated, and avoiding habits like smoking, can reduce inflammation and improve your body's ability to heal and cope with pain, significantly impacting your long-term health.

Takeaway messages:

Think of it this way: your healthcare team provides the map and guidance, but **you** are the one who actively walks the path. The actions and skills you develop and practice each day are what truly build resilience and lead to lasting improvements in your pain and your quality of life.



17. Do you have to follow your exercise plan when you are in pain?

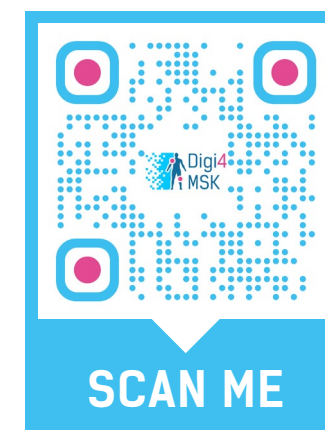
Emma, 45, had been following her exercise plan for shoulder pain for several months. At first, she was proud of her discipline. Every morning before work, she rolled out her mat, did her stretches, and ticked off each exercise exactly as prescribed. She liked the feeling of control—of “doing it right.”

But as time went on, things got complicated. Some mornings her shoulder ached more than usual. She hesitated before starting, unsure whether to push through or skip the session. *“If I can’t do everything perfectly”, she thought, “then it’s pointless.”*

That thought grew stronger. On days when the pain flared, she avoided the exercises altogether, promising she would start again properly tomorrow. Then tomorrow became next week. Each missed session left her feeling guilty, as if all her previous effort had been wasted. *“Either I follow the plan exactly”, she told herself, “or I might as well not do it at all.”*

The pain itself had not worsened much, but her stress about doing things “right” had. She spent more time worrying about the rules of the plan than listening to her body. When friends asked how the program was going, she smiled politely and said, *“I’ll start again soon.”*

Every time she saw her unused exercise mat in the corner, she wondered if there was a middle ground—something between perfection and giving up completely.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding that following an exercise plan does not have to be “all or nothing”.
- Learning how to handle days when pain or fatigue make it hard to follow the plan exactly.
- Recognizing that consistency, flexibility, and self-compassion help more than rigid routines.
- Feeling more confident in adapting your activities to your situation without guilt.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/8BSC5aEoAHs>

17.1. Why does being flexible with your movement help you?

1. **It keeps you going:** Trying to do the exact same exercise on a bad day as on a good day often leads to pain flares. When that happens, it is easy to get discouraged and stop exercising completely. Being flexible means you can adjust, do a little less, or change what you do, so you keep moving and do not give up.
2. **You learn what works for your body:** Your pain can change day by day. A flexible plan teaches you how to **listen to your body** and adapt. This helps you figure out what you can safely do on different days, building your confidence and making you feel more in control of your pain.
3. **No more “all or nothing” thinking:** It is common to think if you cannot do a full workout, it is not worth doing anything. But for pain, **some movement is always better than no movement**. A flexible plan helps you avoid that “all or nothing” trap. Even a short walk or gentle stretches on a tough day keep you moving forward.
4. **It reduces fear and worry:** If you are scared that moving will make your pain worse, you will naturally avoid it. Knowing you can change your activity based on how you feel helps reduce that fear. You learn that movement is safe, and you can control how much you do, even with pain.



17.2. How to be flexible with your activity plan?

1. **Listen to your body—it is your best guide:** Instead of a fixed amount of time or reps, think about how your body feels. If your pain is higher, maybe do less. If you are having a good day, you can do a little more.
2. **“Pacing” is key:** This means balancing activity with rest. Do not push through pain until you crash. Learn to spread your activities throughout the day or week, taking short breaks before pain gets too bad.
3. **Consistency over intensity:** Doing *something* regularly—like a short walk every day—is much more effective for long-term pain management than pushing hard occasionally and then taking weeks off due to a flare-up.
4. **Adjust. Do not stop:** If your plan says walk for 30 minutes but you are having a bad day, try 10 minutes or just gentle stretching, or even just focus on deep breathing. The goal is to stay as active as your pain allows.
5. **Communicate with your healthcare team:** Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about how your plan feels. They can help you learn how to adjust your activities safely and effectively, and taking into consideration other aspects such as possible costs.

Takeaway messages:

Your physical activity plan is a tool to help you live better, not a strict guideline.

By learning to be flexible, you empower yourself to keep moving, build resilience, and improve your health and well-being, even with pain in your life.



18. Are ergonomic changes at work or at home the key to managing pain?

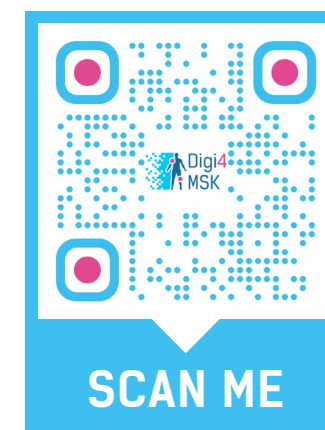
Jonas, 42, worked as an accountant and spent most of his day in front of a computer. Over the past year, he had developed a nagging pain in his neck and lower back that crept in by the afternoon and sometimes followed him home. Convinced that poor posture was to blame, he began searching for the perfect ergonomic setup.

He adjusted his chair height, changed his desk, and ordered a special lumbar cushion. For a few days, it seemed to help—but the pain always came back. Each time it did, Jonas grew more frustrated. *"Maybe I'm still sitting wrong"*, he thought. He began checking his posture constantly, keeping his back perfectly straight and his shoulders tense for hours.

Coworkers noticed how stiff he looked. *"Relax, Jonas"*, one joked, *"you look like you're posing for a photo"*. But Jonas could not. He worried that one wrong movement would make the pain worse. At home, he sat the same way on the sofa, always correcting himself, always searching for the right position.

When even watching a movie became uncomfortable, he started to feel trapped in his own body. Despite all the adjustments, the pain had not changed much—and now, sitting itself felt like work.

Every morning, as he carefully arranged his chair and screen again, Jonas wondered if he was missing something. If posture was not the full answer, then what was?



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to apply small, practical changes in daily routines to reduce stiffness and discomfort.
- Understanding that comfort often comes from movement and flexibility, not rigid "perfect" positions.
- Recognizing when to adjust your workspace and when to simply change posture or take a break.
- Feeling more confident in experimenting safely with different ways of sitting, standing, and moving throughout the day.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/q5b8g9SDNow>

18.1. Why does your body love movement more than a “perfect” posture?

1. **Your body is not fragile. It loves to move!** Think of your body like a healthy tree that sways in the wind. It is strong and adaptable. Sitting perfectly still in one rigid position for hours, even a “good” one, can make you feel stiff and uncomfortable. Your spine is designed to bend, twist, and move in all sorts of ways.
2. **“Perfect posture” is a myth for pain prevention.** Studies looking at office workers show that even with adjustable chairs and fancy setups, people do not necessarily have less back or neck pain. The idea of one “correct” posture you need to hold all day is not supported by what we know now.
3. **Pain is complex—not just about your chair.** Your pain rarely goes away just by changing one thing (like your posture or how your desk is set up). Many things play a role, including how much you move overall, your stress levels, how well you sleep, and even your mood. Focusing only on your chair misses the bigger picture.
4. **Movement variety is your superpower!** Instead of worrying about a single “right” way to sit, focus on **changing your position often**. This means getting up, stretching, and shifting around frequently. This constant movement is much more helpful for your body and your pain than trying to stay perfectly still.



18.2. What can you do? Simple tips for a pain-friendly workday

1. **Move often:** Set an alarm to remind yourself to stand up, stretch, or walk for a minute or two every 30 to 60 minutes.
2. **Shift and wiggle:** Even while sitting, change your position often. Lean back, lean forward, shift from side to side. The next posture is often the best posture!
3. **Find your comfort:** Set up your chair and desk so you feel comfortable. Do not stress about exact angles, just make sure it is comfortable for you, and remember to try new positions too. Finding what is comfortable is key!
4. **Stay active overall:** Try to get regular exercise. Walking, swimming, or whatever you enjoy helps keep your body strong and happy.
5. **Manage stress & sleep:** These play a huge role in how you feel pain. Look for ways to reduce stress and get enough quality sleep.

Takeaway messages:

Your body is incredibly resilient. By focusing on **movement, variety, and overall healthy habits**, you are giving your body what it truly needs to manage pain and feel better, far more than any single chair adjustment ever could.

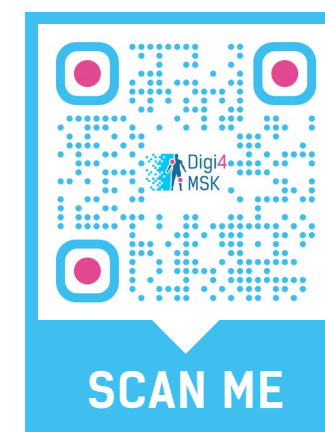
19. How should pain flare-ups be managed?

Claudia, 50, had been doing well with her back pain for several months. She had learned to stay active, sleep better, and pace her workdays. But one morning, after cleaning the house and carrying laundry up the stairs, the pain suddenly flared again—sharp and familiar.

Her first reaction was panic. *“Not again”* she whispered. She cancelled her plans for the weekend, afraid that any movement might make things worse. The disappointment hit hard; she had believed the pain was finally under control. Lying on the sofa, she replayed the last few days in her head, searching for what she had done wrong.

By the next afternoon, the pain had eased a little, though the fear lingered. Each time she felt a twinge, she froze, listening to her body like it was an unpredictable alarm. *“If this happens every time I’m active”*, she thought, *“how will I ever get back to normal?”*

Claudia felt trapped between two instincts: to rest completely until the pain disappeared, or to ignore it and push through. Neither felt right. What she really wanted was to understand how to react—to know what kind of activity was safe and what might actually help her recover faster.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to apply practical steps when pain suddenly worsens.
- Understanding the difference between protective rest and complete inactivity.
- Recognizing that flare-ups are common and manageable parts of long-term recovery.
- Building confidence to adjust activity levels safely instead of stopping everything during a setback.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/t4cjhYznE3s>

19.1. What to do during a pain flare-up?

The key during a flare-up is to **adjust your activities, not stop them completely**. Your goal is not to get rid of all pain right away, but to stay active in a way that does not further aggravate your pain. This will show your brain that it is okay to move your body.

Take into account the following aspects:

1. **Your body is stronger than you think:** Even if it hurts a bit, moving usually does not mean you are causing harm or damage. Pain is just a signal, and sometimes it can be a bit overprotective. Listen to your body, but remember that movement is often good for you, even if you do experience some pain while staying active.
2. **Keep moving, but slower:** Imagine your pain is a “speed bump,” not a brick wall. You do not have to stop completely; you just need to slow down and go over it carefully. Remember:
 - **Pace yourself:** This is a super important skill. Break down bigger tasks (like housework, walking, or even getting dressed) into smaller chunks. Do a little, rest a bit, then do a little more. For example, if you usually walk for 20 minutes, during a flare-up you might try taking two shorter 5-minute walks with a rest in between.
 - **Also, reduce the “dose”:** If you usually lift 10 kilos, try 5. If you walk 2 kilometres, try 1. It is about doing some activity, not all activity.
3. **Stay active in your daily life:** It is not just about formal exercise. Everyday tasks count too. Can you do the dishes while sitting? Can you stand and stretch while watching TV? Keeping up with these little movements helps your body stay active and prevents stiffness and weakness.
4. **Feel more in control:** By learning to adjust your activities, you will feel more confident and less helpless during pain flare-ups. You will know you have tools to manage it, which can make you less worried and improve your mood. This builds your resilience over time.



Takeaway messages:

During a pain flare-up, the best thing you can do is **adjust, not stop**. Use your usual pain medication as prescribed. Keep moving in a comfortable way, break tasks into smaller parts, and focus on what you can do. Additionally, you can reflect on the triggers of such pain flareups. This smart approach will help you maintain your strength, reduce fear, and get back to your regular activities sooner.



20. Be smart about pain advice: What to trust on social media?

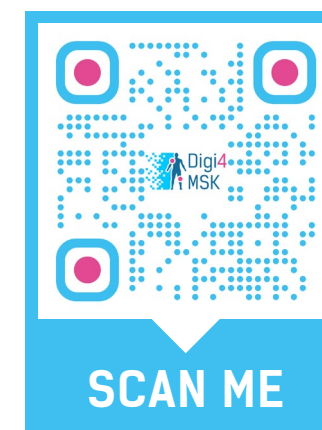
Elisa, 37, had been struggling with recurring neck pain after the birth of her second child. Between sleepless nights and carrying her baby, her shoulders felt tense all the time. She wanted quick answers, but her schedule left little room for appointments. So, like many others, she turned to social media.

Her feed quickly filled with advice: one influencer promised *"a one-minute stretch to cure neck pain forever"* another warned that her pain came from *"toxins in the lymphatic system"* while a third claimed she needed to *"release emotional blockages"* to heal. Each video looked convincing—friendly faces, catchy music, clear instructions. Elisa saved them all.

Over the next weeks, she tried every tip she saw online: massages with spoons, ice showers, stretching while holding her breath, and even a posture corrector sold in a livestream. Some things helped briefly, others made her feel worse. When she asked about it in a parenting forum, replies flooded in—everyone swore by something different.

One night, scrolling through yet another post claiming to *"fix pain instantly"* Elisa stopped. She realized she no longer knew which information to trust. *"How can I tell who actually knows what they're talking about?"*, she wondered.

She did not want to stop looking for help online—but she wanted to know how to do it safely, without getting lost in so many opinions.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Learning how to tell the difference between reliable and misleading pain advice online.
- Understanding why some health content on social media can be biased or based on personal opinion.
- Recognizing signs of trustworthy sources—qualified professionals, scientific evidence, and transparency.
- Feeling confident about using the internet safely to support, not replace, professional healthcare.

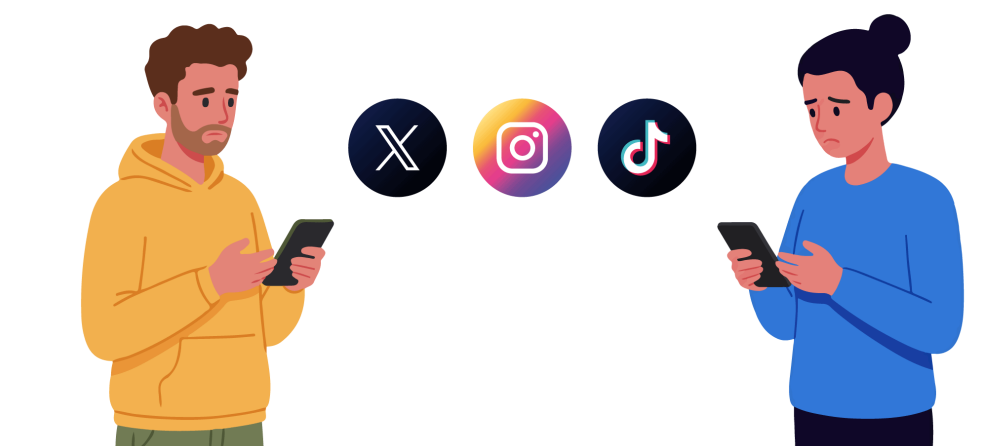
YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/FZXnVyZ8vGY>

20.1. Why does not “popular” always mean best for your health?

1. **Anyone can post anything:** Social media is open to everyone. This means anyone can share health tips, even if they do not have any medical training or proof that what they are saying actually works.
2. **No fact-checking:** Unlike healthcare professionals or scientific journals, social media posts are not checked by experts. What you see, often has not been tested or proven to be true or safe.
3. **Risk of harm:** Following bad advice can lead to real problems. You might waste money on things that do not work, delay getting the actual help you need, or even try something that makes your pain worse.
4. **Hidden motives:** Many influencers are paid to promote products (like supplements, special diets, or equipment) or to get you to sign up for their own paid programs. Their main goal might be to sell something, not necessarily to give you the best medical advice.

20.2. How to spot reliable health advice online?

1. **Who is this person?** Do they have real medical training (like a doctor, physical therapist, or registered nurse)? Are they licensed? Be wary of someone who just calls themselves an “expert”, “specialist” or “coach” without clear, recognized credentials.
2. **Is it “too good to be true”?** Be very cautious of claims about “quick fixes,” “secret cures,” or promises that everyone will be pain-free overnight. Real pain management takes time and effort.
3. **Is it based on science or stories?** Good health advice is based on solid research, not just one person’s amazing story. If they only show “before and after” photos or testimonials without mentioning studies, be sceptical.
4. **Are they selling something?** If the advice always pushes a specific product, supplement, discount code, or paid program, be extra careful. There might be a hidden motive.
5. **Do they badmouth doctors?** Be cautious of influencers who claim doctors are hiding information or that traditional medicine is a conspiracy. This often suggests they are promoting unproven alternatives.



Takeaway messages:

Your doctor, physical therapist, or other licensed healthcare professional is your best source for personalized, safe, and effective pain management advice. If you find something online that sounds interesting or makes you curious, please **bring it up at your next appointment!** You can talk about it together and figure out if it is right for you. Your well-being is our top priority.



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