

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

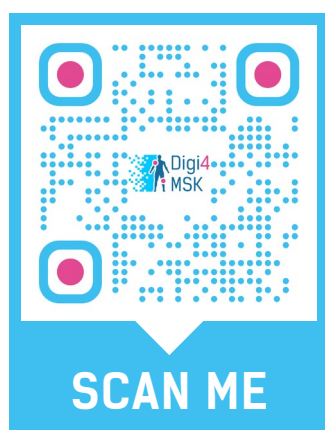
Laura, 39, works as a graphic designer. She spends long hours sitting at her desk and often feels a dull ache in her neck and shoulder. It started after a stressful project a few months ago. At first, she thought she had simply “pulled a muscle,” but the ache never fully disappeared.

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.

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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.



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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.