

12. Can mental health support help with pain management?

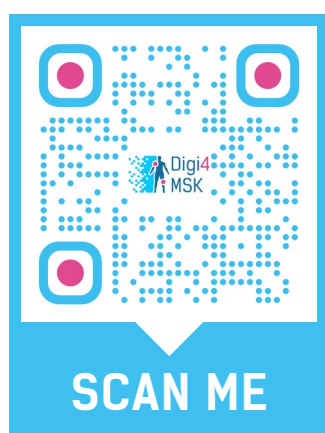
Charlotte, 39, was in a car accident almost two years ago. It was not severe—no broken bones, no major injuries—but her neck had snapped forward sharply. The doctors called it “whiplash”. They told her the pain would probably ease within weeks.

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.

