

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

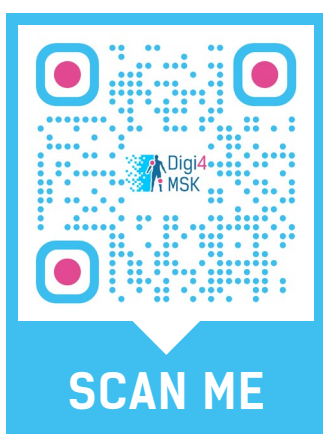
Lars, 48, had been struggling with back pain for almost a decade. He had tried everything—painkillers, massages, injections, even several rounds of physiotherapy. Each treatment helped for a short while, but the pain always crept back. *"Nothing works"*, he often said.

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.