

Coping with Chronic Pain during COVID-19

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, many young people and their families are being asked to spend more time at home and your usual routine has been disrupted. We do not know how long some of these changes will last, like changes to going to school or seeing friends and family. But whilst we wait for this situation to settle, we hope that the following advice helps you during this tricky time.

Keep a routine

Try and keep to your regular routine as much as possible. If your school is closed, make a plan for what you are going to do throughout the day. It is important for young people to have a mixture of school work, exercise, rest time and fun things to do (baking, drawing, board games etc.)

Stay active

Keeping your muscles moving is super important when it comes to managing your pain. Try to be creative about the ways you can exercise. Make use of things you have in your home such as the stairs, or maybe clear some space to do some stretching, yoga or family exercise videos in the lounge! Feeling bored? Have a go at creating your own family sports day or play some games in the garden! If you see a physiotherapist, keep on practicing any stretches or exercises given to you.

Get some fresh air

Being outside is great for our bodies, but also for our brains and looking after our mental health. Try to get outside when you can and go for short walks as much as possible. Make use of any green space you have – take a break outside and see if you can hear the birds, have a go at some gardening or plant some bulbs which you can watch grow over the next couple of months!



Relax

It is normal to feel worried or confused when experiencing a new situation like this. It's good to talk to one another about how you are feeling, so that any worries or frustrations don't bubble up inside. Try some relaxation techniques, such as guided visualisations or breathing exercises, lots of these can be found on YouTube – try a few until you find one that works for you.

Distraction is a good way to relax. Try listening to some music, being creative, watching something funny, board games, having a bath or teaching yourself a new skill or craft! Spending time with pets can also help, as well as staying connected with your friends.

There are many things we can and cannot control at the moment. You might find the amount of time you spend reading the news or social media is making you worry. If so, try to limit the amount of time you spend on this and focus your energy towards the things you can control, such as finding fun things to do at home.



Sleep

We understand that it can be difficult to sleep when you are experiencing chronic pain, particularly if there are changes going on around you such as the ones we are all experiencing at the moment. To aid a better night's sleep we recommend:

- Having fixed times for going to bed and waking
- Try to avoid sleeping in after a poor night's sleep
- Relaxing before going to bed. i.e. have bath or shower, read a book, have a hot drink
- Avoid being on your phone or computer for at least one hour before bedtime
- Maintain a comfortable sleeping environment: not too hot, cold, noisy or bright
- Avoid napping during the day
- Avoid caffeine within 6 hours of going to bed (tea/coffee, energy drinks, etc.)
- Avoid exercising within a couple of hours to your bedtime
- Try not to watch or check the clock throughout the night
- Only use your bed for sleep. Do not lie in bed on your phone, watching TV or complete school work in bed during the day
- Spend time outside during the day when it is light
- If 20 minutes pass and you are still unable to sleep, get out of bed and have a break for a short period of time. During this you could try listening to some guided imagery/breathing exercises, or some light activity such as reading a book.
- If there are lots of thoughts or worries going through your mind at night, keep a pen and paper handy by your bedside and write these thoughts or worries down. If they are 'things to do', you can sort them out the next day, and if they are worries, you might find it helpful to talk to someone in your family about these.

Helpful resources

We would like to remind you of the following videos and books, which we feel are helpful in being able to understand and cope better with pain:



Apps for relaxation:

- Insight timer
- Headspace

You Tube – Understanding Chronic Pain:

- Tame The Beast - It's time to rethink persistent pain by Tame the Beast
- Understanding the Complexity of Pain by Generation Care
- Persistent pain - a bell in a storm by Generation Care

You Tube – Yoga:

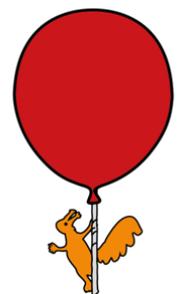
- Yoga for complete beginners – by Yoga with Adriene
- Yoga for teens (intermediate) – by Yoga with Adriene
- Yoga for neck, shoulders and upper back – by Yoga with Adriene

You Tube - Pilates

Total body Pilates! 20 minute tone and shape by Psyche Truth

You Tube – High Intensity Interval Training

Quick and easy low impact beginners workout - The Body Coach



We hope you find these suggestions useful and wish you and your families well.

The Chronic Pain Team at Alder Hey Children's Hospital