

Retrain your pain system

Just as the pain system learned to be overprotective, it can be retrained to work normally thanks to bioplasticity.



Bioplasticity is the ability of our body tissues and all our body systems to adapt to experience or to learn.

One example is how the immune system can be trained to respond quicker to a germ if it has fought it off before, which is how vaccinations work. Another is how muscles, including the heart, respond to training by altering their length and speed of contractions – so you grow stronger and fitter when you train regularly.

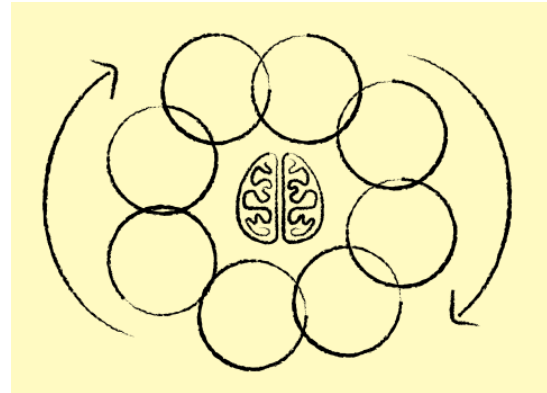
Bioplasticity exists no matter what your age. All it requires is your time, persistence, patience, courage, open mindedness and a little help. The first step is to understand your pain system, how it works and how it can become hypersensitive and overprotective. Knowing that pain is affected by thoughts, feelings, moods, sayings and everything else that makes up its context can give you the confidence to move, even when it hurts, and nudge your protective buffer back in the right direction.

A good coach will help you understand your pain and identify the things that make it worse or better. A great coach, who has training in pain science, will teach you how to plan your recovery one week at a time. They'll also encourage you to persevere, train smart and not panic if your pain flares up. Your coach could be your physio, doctor, exercise scientist or nurse. Or you could start without a coach, moving just a little more than you normally would and lifting your heart rate, little by little.

Thanks to pain science, we now know that:

- Pain doesn't indicate tissue damage, it protects the body
- Bioplasticity allows the pain system to be retrained

- Exposing the brain to new information or reminding it of situations or activities that were full of safety messages (SIMs) is a good way to retrain the system
- Other people's understanding of pain can influence that pain
- The trick is not to avoid all life's challenges, emotional or physical – it's to retrain the system to cope with them



Learning to move again freely and believe that you are safe takes effort, practice, persistence and lots of little wins. So keep going!

This fact sheet is not specific medical advice. But we really hope that, once you've read it, you'll understand more about pain and the latest ways of managing it

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This fact sheet has been adapted from its original format for accessibility purposes. Please see <https://www.painrevolution.org/painfacts> for the original fact sheet in multiple languages.

Adapted by a [Canadian] occupational therapist working
with people in chronic pain.