

SELF HELP PLAN

Advice for self help - 5 Point Plan

Below is a formula that should help you back to good health and stay that way.

(L)aser

Avoid	<i>Avoid things that hurt</i>
Sleep	<i>Sleep lots and earlier than normal</i>
Exercise	<i>Where possible keep moving; when better exercise daily (get out of breath)</i>
Routine	<i>People living by routine enjoy the <u>best</u> health</i>
Laughter	<i>Laughing improves the state of mind, a major player in pain improver</i>

Avoidance

Patient - “Doctor doctor it hurts every time I put my hand above my head”. Doctor – “Don’t put your hand above your head then silly man”. The moral of the story is avoid things that hurt or bring on pain. There is a clinical reason for this. When we are creating pain, some tissue somewhere is undergoing damaged. Common sense dictates that whilst damage is taking place it cannot be healing. This means if we continue to “push” ourselves further and further into pain, over time not only is healing time robbed from the body, there is more “making good” for the body to do later. The idea of “going through the pain-barrier” is a fallacy for most people. More times than not you are likely to get worse

Re-injury is possibly the commonest reason why people don’t seem to get better and so end up seeking professional help. The problem is that people typically don’t know what to do for right or wrong for the body. Further, the body can take several hours to produce a new wave of inflammation (pain), by which time you are unlikely to remember how that re-injury event took place. If you are one of these people who find it difficult to “listen” to your body – the following formula may help. You are likely to re-injure if you have been

- (1) sitting too much
- (2) standing too much
- (3) not lying down enough.

The difficulty lies as to what is “too much”. This will vary from person to person and from time of day to day of week. It is a widely variable figure that is sometimes hard for patients to understand. We all have our personal limit of “too much”. Perhaps this is the most important part of your treatment / management / self help instruction from your practitioner. Patients who grasp and practice this principle in their daily lives are the ones who manage the best “on their own”. Generally (to get you started) we suggest no more than 20 mins sitting or standing; and up to 60 mins at a time to lie down. The idea is to keep chopping and changing your posture. Remember “ a change is as good as a rest” – and postural variety is what we are after. However this figure is widely variable and cannot be relied upon in acute cases of pain, or where pain has been a long standing feature in a person’s life. Seek professional help.

Sleep

Sleep is the panacea of all ails. The power of sleep (and rest) is as old as the hills. Sleep delivers many clinical advantages to the body – it makes things better, better and faster. We heal when we asleep - *“the man with the needle and thread produces*

his best work whilst you are asleep". This is why it is important to get a good night's sleep. By the early hours of the morning (ie 4am approx), the body starts to release "waking up" hormones. So if you have had a late night, it follows you would reduce the time available for healing. So for example, if you went to bed at, say 1am, there is only three hours of healing available to you (ie before 4am). However, if you were in bed, say 2 hours the good side of midnight, ie 10pm, you have now increased the amount of time to heal in, (an increase from 3 to 6 hours). That's also the reason why getting an early night is also known as getting your "beauty sleep". It is regenerative and restorative to *all* systems of the body.

Tip: In relation to most cases of non-pathological pain (ie "normal" backache / pain) try getting two weeks of early bed-time. You will be amazed at the difference to your pain levels.

Exercise

Exercise is a great leveller. It balances out emotions and physical tensions. It relaxes the body and freshens up your tissues. Exercise also produces heat. Heat is a catalyst to all reactions in the body. Whilst increasing the blood flow throughout the body, it heightens the metabolic process, including healing. Fitter people heal quicker. The best way of achieving this is by doing exercises that get you out of breath.

Aerobic activity – exercises that get you out of breath. This is the best. People often say "my work keeps me fit". If going to work were a way of keeping fit, people would be saying "I go to fitness" rather than "I go to work". Truth is when we "go to work", our bodies perform just that – "work". Exercise has an entirely different physiology and outcome upon the body. Amongst the obvious reasons for exercising (ie fitness) there is a "self-massage" effect. When a person is heavily out of breath we use not only our chest muscles for breathing, we recruit stomach and neck muscles too, to help us breathe. In short the entire length of the spine and ribs continually move. This helps tight neck shoulder and back muscles to ease. The principle is a bit like stretching first thing in the morning: we work our muscles to relax them. When we exercise regularly, it becomes a bit like a tonic to the muscles and joints, from a clinical perspective. Exercise also improves stamina, mental and physical, coordination, balance and cerebral acuity. The main with exercise is to make it a routine. That means at the same time, every day, five days a week. It is better to go five times a week for 10 minutes, than three times for 20 minutes. Tip: try listening to music when you exercise – ie go to the gym and exercise whilst you listen to three songs. Then you can go.

The recommended exercises at the gym are – cycling machine, skiing machine (cross trainer), stepping machine.

Routine

The human body thrives on routine. It heals better. Regenerates better. Lasts longer. This is seen abundantly babies and children. When they are fed at certain times of the day, bathed at certain times, put to bed at a certain time etc, they thrive. We all know that if you change a child's routine it upsets the applecart the child fails to thrive as well. This phenomena is seen again in adulthood, notably when we are ill. Patients

that get in to good routines heal faster. ie go to bed *early* and get a good night's sleep; eat all your meals, take in fluids regularly, follow your medication (if prescribed); maintain your clinical orders (ie bed rest or gentle exercises etc).

A good routine to follow during your acute period (for a few weeks – hopefully longer) is:

- 1 Try and be in bed at least 1-2 hours the good side of midnight (ie 10pm-11pm).
- 2 Try to take a daily knap at the same time, preferably in the afternoon. A single 20 minutes down-time will make an ocean of difference, especially when you are suffering.
- 3 Try to eat, exercise, sleep and awaken at the same time every day. When you get better you may keep the Friday and Saturdays as “un-routined” if you wish, but try and get an early night on every Sunday, ready for Monday morning work. If you go out late during the week days, try to have at least 3 early nights elsewhere in the week.

Laughter

“Laugh more Live Longer” - (and healthier). There is much research to support that laughter is not only a “tonic” to the brain or that it helps you live longer, but importantly for us it produces “happy hormones” that are known to diminish pain. Where I am from, India, there are laughing clubs (*not* comedy clubs) in which people are taught how to laugh again – almost clinically. This is because the benefits to health and mind are so greatly valued. Laughter is also believed to reduce the incidence of illness over a life-time. Laughing produces a release and people are taught to laugh till their sides ache!

Here in the UK, we can achieve something similar by laughing outwardly when watching a comedy, or speaking on the phone – call someone who makes you laugh. Some people seem to laugh more than others. If it appeals to you, try closing the doors and windows and have a go at laughing on your own. Doesn't matter how you get to laugh – just try. On occasions where this is not possible, you can create a similar effect by releasing the happy hormones through exercise. If you can do the two – that's best of all.