

Managing a Pain Flare

Nearly all people with chronic pain have “flares.” Flares are short-term rises in one’s usual level of pain. These flares may last a few hours, days or weeks. The reason for the flare may be easy to find or not. Making a plan with your provider may help control these flares.

Figure out if this rise in pain is a flare or a new pain. A flare will be pain in the same place and same type as usual, but more severe. There is no need to share these with a provider. If new symptoms of illness such as fever, vomiting, or numbness occur with the flares, these should be reported.

Pain flares do not last long. When pain worsens, good coping skills will help to avoid fear and worry that may lead to even more pain. Good coping skills may include:

- Humor
- Friendship
- Hobbies
- Spirituality
- Pets
- Meditation and relaxation
- Time to yourself
- Physical activity
- Reading

Figure out what might have caused this flare. Simple causes may be:

- Eating certain foods
- Chewing gum
- Poor posture
- Change in daily routines
- Sleep schedules

- Weather
- Exercise
- Stress
- Hormones
- Injury

Causes may also be more complex and harder to see. Keep a log to help you learn the cause of a flare and to manage the pain. This can help avoid flares in the future.

Figure out if your activity level has changed lately. Return to a normal routine to help manage a flare. Pace yourself. Balance activity with rest during the day. Slowly increase what you are doing and take frequent, short breaks. It may help to reduce activity by 25-50% for one to two days and then to return to a normal routine. It may also be helpful to increase stretching and walking. Learn and practice those exercises that help the most during a flare.

Do something each day to distract you from the pain.

- Watch a movie
- Listen to music
- Read a book
- Visit family or friends

Use your medicine as ordered. Do not make changes without talking with your provider. Add non-drug forms of pain relief to the care plan. Talk about the use of heat, ice, massage, or exercise with your provider.