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Pain doesn't equal tissue damage



Pain Facts 3/9
Pain doesn't equal tissue damage

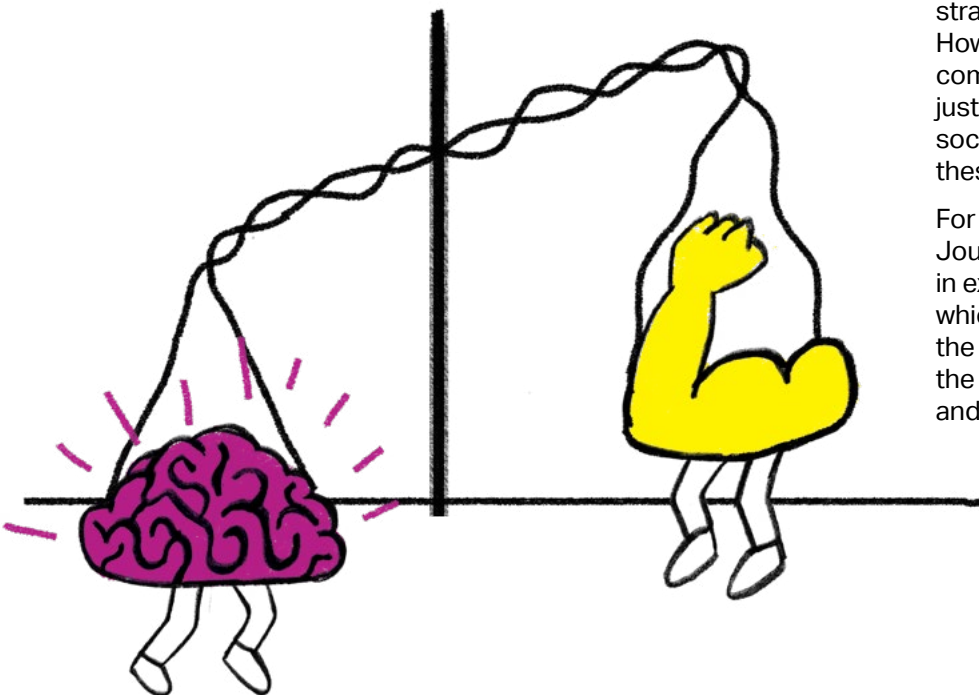
All pain is real, no matter what's causing it. What surprises most people is that you can have pain when there is no tissue damage. That is, when there's no damage to muscles, tendons, nerves or any of the linings within the body.

Maybe the damage was there once, but pain keeps occurring long after the damage has healed.

What's also unexpected is that you can have an abnormal scan unrelated to your pain. In fact, there's a vast amount of research that convincingly shows many people with 'abnormalities' on scans have no pain and can't recall ever having an injury. As you age, it's actually more normal to have them than not.

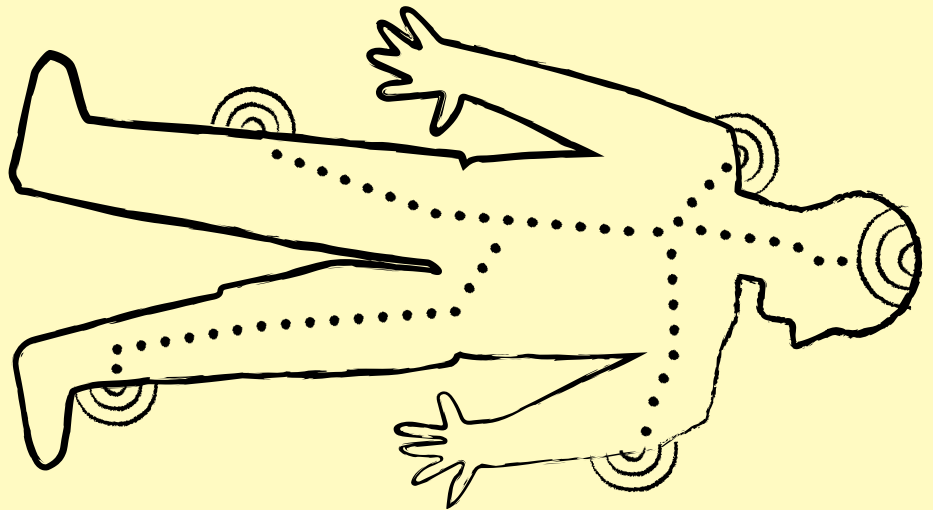
The reason there can be such a big difference between pain and damage is simple. Tissue can withstand only a certain amount of load (movement, strain or pressure) before it's damaged. However, our pain system is extraordinarily complex and is triggered by more than just tissue load. Psychological and social factors can also cause pain – these are called non-tissue factors.

For instance, in 1995, the British Medical Journal reported the case of a builder in excruciating pain from a 15cm nail, which pierced his work boot. But when the doctors removed it, they found the nail had passed between his toes and missed his foot completely.



Thanks to pain science, we now know that:

- Most pain episodes occur to prevent tissue damage



- With persistent pain, the pain system becomes more efficient and can be overprotective

- When pain persists, it often gets stronger and lasts longer

Understanding there are non-tissue factors in all persistent pain states can help you reduce your pain.

- With persistent pain the influence of non-tissue factors usually becomes greater

- Non-tissue factors include stress, anxiety, fear of injury, poor sleep, worry about returning to work, or even a long commute

- Abnormalities on scans aren't necessarily the reason for pain

- Even how you are told about these scan results can cause pain

- Humans have an amazing capacity to heal, repair and adapt

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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