

## Naming the Fear



When we discussed our sensory nervous system, we realised that our pain system is very effective at protecting us and keeping us safe. Not only is pain very unpleasant, but pain also triggers emotions - fear and worry especially. This is normal and affects everybody to some degree. This fear of what is wrong shifts over time to other worries, often around stirring up the pain. Avoiding things that stir up the pain is largely based on the fear of pain. Without fear, you might do it anyway. But that feeling of dread will make you think about it more than twice!

Just as this is a powerful protective mechanism during injury or illness, this fear continues to play an important although more hidden role in chronic pain. You may not feel at all fearful or notice that you are worried. Still, if you avoid an activity because it made your pain worse in the past, maybe it is this fear that makes you decide not to try it again, put it off or get stressed even before you start?

If pain - or the fear of stirring it up - pushes you too far into avoidance this can make you feel isolated, less confident, and low in mood. It can also cause you to lose strength and fitness. Naming the fear and worries can help you change how you respond to your fear – now you are aware of it. It can be helpful to look at things you have been avoiding and explore the worries that have caused this. Becoming aware of these automatic responses pain triggers will help you notice when you feel worried about doing something or avoid something. It gives you a chance once you notice these patterns to think about them a little bit more, e.g. “why do I say that I can’t do this – what’s the worst that could happen?”, “is it dangerous to my body to walk to the corner dairy?”, “is it going to make me safer if I don’t leave the house to go for a walk?”, or “is it more of a problem if I don’t leave the house to go for a walk?”

Each person has different conditions and pain experiences so again, it is matter of working out what is right for you. The most important thing is that you understand that pain, with the help of fear, is designed to make you avoid things. Once you know that, you are in a position to analyse that message rather than accept it automatically. This might give you an opportunity to take some control over your life with pain.

Next resource:  
Breathing for pain