

## Hei whakakōpani Putting it all together

At the beginning of this programme we discussed the impact of pain on your life and we broadly divided the things it affected into physical, social (work, family and friends) and mood. We also talked about the impact of pain on your wairua, that is, your sense of self, wellbeing and connectedness.

Throughout these modules we have tried to fill your kete, your basket, with lots of knowledge about pain and through that understanding we hope this knowledge has empowered you to feel more in charge of your pain. We have offered lots of strategies that are based on this knowledge to support you to live well despite your pain. We have encouraged you to use this knowledge to try out the strategies so you can bring about some change in your life.

In terms of knowledge, the purpose of the early modules was to help you understand pain as part of our normal sensory system and its relationship to the stress response. We discussed how the stress response affects us physically, emotionally and mentally. We hope you now know how deeply embedded these systems and responses are within all of us and how they are designed to help keep us safe. As part of this safety response pain is designed to evoke fear and avoidance, whether conscious or unconscious.

However, you also now know that our brains process incoming information and make decisions designed to keep us safe but sometimes it doesn't quite get it right. Our systems are complicated and generally look after us very well but they are not perfect. We discussed how chronic pain becomes less and less reliable as time goes on in terms of being a useful warning about tissue damage or threat to our body.

Chronic pain keeps your systems in a heightened state, constantly on the alert. This is exhausting but at the same time although you feel tired it impacts on your ability to relax and to sleep.

We have talked about the links for everybody between what we think, how we feel and what we do in relation to our pain experience. Then we explored a little more how that affects you when you have chronic pain.

We also discussed neurosignatures and neurotags and how our brain and systems are programmed to learn and also tend to repeat known patterns.

Based on all this knowledge we have discussed strategies to put in your kete. The first step after understanding is to notice how the responses above affect you personally. Noticing something happening and understanding why, is the first step to being able to influence or change something.

No matter what you are trying to influence or change in your life with regard your pain, focus on the things that you value and that are important to you. Try to choose something every day however small, that gives you pleasure, that you enjoy. Find things that make you smile and laugh. Tap into those natural feel good responses in your brain.

Stay connected with friends and loved ones and remember not to expect them to “just know” what is the right thing for them to say or do.

There is good evidence that regular exercise is helpful when living with chronic pain, especially things that help you get fitter or stronger. It is worth the challenge, don't be afraid to try.

Breathing and relaxation techniques and mindful techniques help to dampen down the stress response. Be aware of what makes you feel safe and what makes you feel unsafe

Regular exercise and relaxation techniques can help with sleep, as does a regular routine. Caffeine and smoking can impact on sleep.

Notice how you think and how you feel affects what you do. Explore reframing your thoughts. Try not to let the pain dictate what you do. Try to organise yourself to enable you to do more by pacing and avoid boom busting. Find a framework that works for you.

Don't let the pain stop you from making plans. Make a 'flare up plan' and keep to it. Let who you are, what you value and what is important to you direct what you do, not the pain

***Use your kete, keep it up, start again - revisit some of the modules you have completed. Introducing changes in your life takes a lot of perseverance and repetition, celebrate your successes!***

