

Why do we have pain?



Pain is an unpleasant conscious (thinking) experience that your brain sends out when all the information suggests that you need to protect a particular part of your body.

If pain was not so very unpleasant, we would not look after our bodies in the way we need to. In rare cases where people don't feel pain, those people often don't live very long. Keeping our bodies well is a huge job. Nowadays we could be run over in traffic or injured doing one of a whole range of activities in or outside the house. One of the main reasons we are able to get through so many different situations is we want to avoid pain.

Pain does not just protect us by telling us when things are going wrong, and we need to attend to the problem. Much of what we do and how we move is in order to avoid pain. We remember situations that have led to pain in the past and due to our fear of getting pain again we avoid the same situation again. This ability of the human race to adapt and learn is the reason the human race has been so successful in surviving. Trying to avoid pain is really important part of being a human and guides us in what we do whether we are in pain or not.

However, this protective pain system is by no means fool proof. Disease and changes caused by a wide range of health conditions can affect our protective pain system. When this system is affected the triggers for pain become less related to actual harm and more linked to what we think could happen and past memories, which are often about pain. As a result, our protective pain system becomes the cause of disability, because our bodies are deeply programmed to trust pain to guide us to be safe.