

Pain management

The role of clinical psychologists in pain management

When someone has pain it affects them physically, psychologically and socially. Conversely, someone's pre-existing physical, psychological and social well-being contributes to how badly their pain is experienced and how well they respond to treatment. In the United Kingdom, the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence recommends that treatment for low back pain and other types of pain include psychological interventions. This multi-disciplinary approach to pain is also advocated in other countries such as Australia and America.

Clinical psychologists help people with pain to:

- Understand the pain cycle (see below diagram)

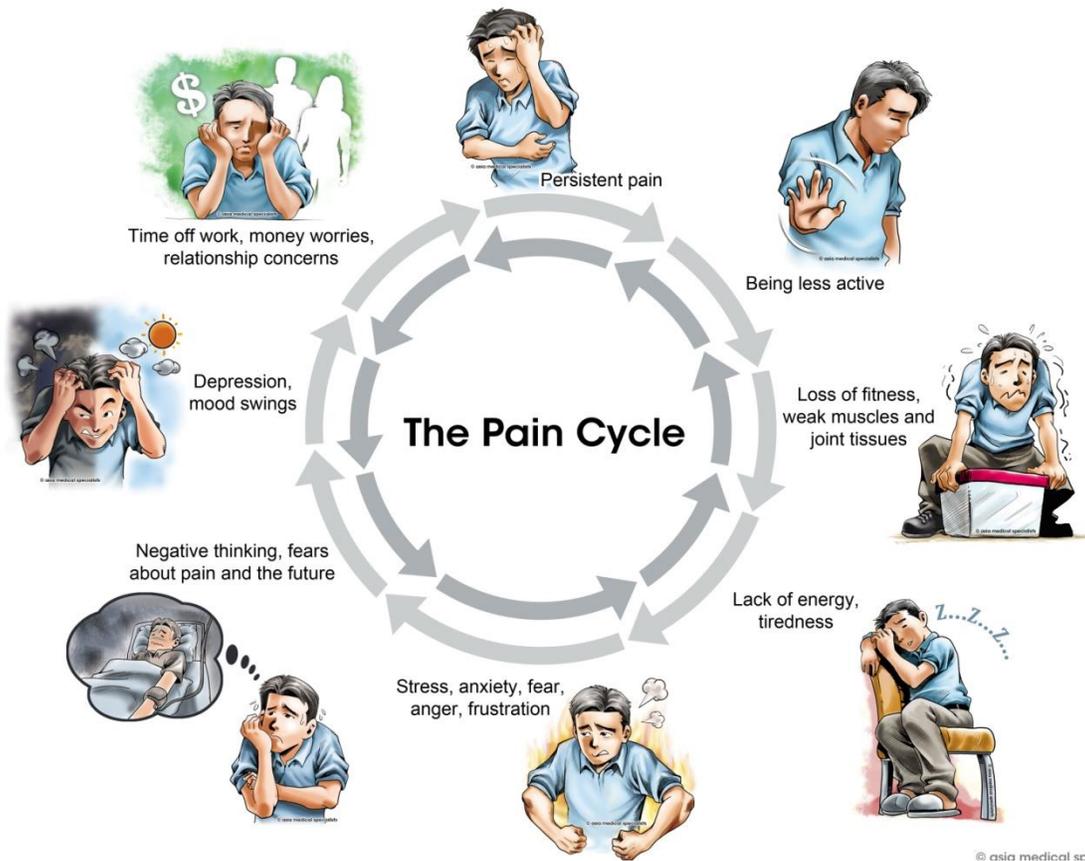


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- Think about what makes the pain better and worse
- Set goals
- Identify rewards
- Understand pacing skills (i.e., doing the right amount of activity to avoid 'boom and bust')
- Understand the importance of getting fitter and carrying out physiotherapy exercises
- Develop problem solving skills
- Understand sleep and sleep problems
- Find ways to relax (e.g., visualisation and progressive muscle relaxation exercises)
- Improve communication and relationships with important others
- Manage emotional distress, such as anger, depression, anxiety
- Identify thoughts and images that may be intensifying their pain experience (e.g., expecting the worst to happen)
- Accept their pain and that it may not go away
- Get the most out of life despite the pain

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Dr Justin Grayer, Registered and Chartered Clinical Psychologist (UK), is a specialist in mental health with specific experience in working with individuals and couples aged 16 years and older with depression, anxiety and stress; addictions; physical health and disability, and sexual health and relationship problems.