

# **Stress You Can! Strategies to Manage and Live with Stress**



- Manitoba Pain Care Program
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- Created by Dr. Elena Bilevicius and Ms. Jessica Erickson OT Reg (MB)

Health services across Manitoba are provided in facilities located on the original lands of First Nations, Inuit, and on the national homeland of the Red River Métis Nation.

Manitoba's health authorities respect that First Nations treaties were made on these territories, acknowledge harms and mistakes, and we dedicate ourselves to collaborate in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in the spirit of reconciliation.



# Housekeeping

- Please be respectful and remember confidentiality
- Please silence your phones
- No recording of the presentation
- Download or print off the presentation slides at [panamclinic.org/patient-resources/](http://panamclinic.org/patient-resources/)



# Housekeeping

- We encourage participation in practical exercises
- This session provides information and recommended strategies for pain self-management that applies to *most* individuals / persistent pain conditions but may not meet the needs of those seeking more specific or detailed information about their unique concerns or pain condition.

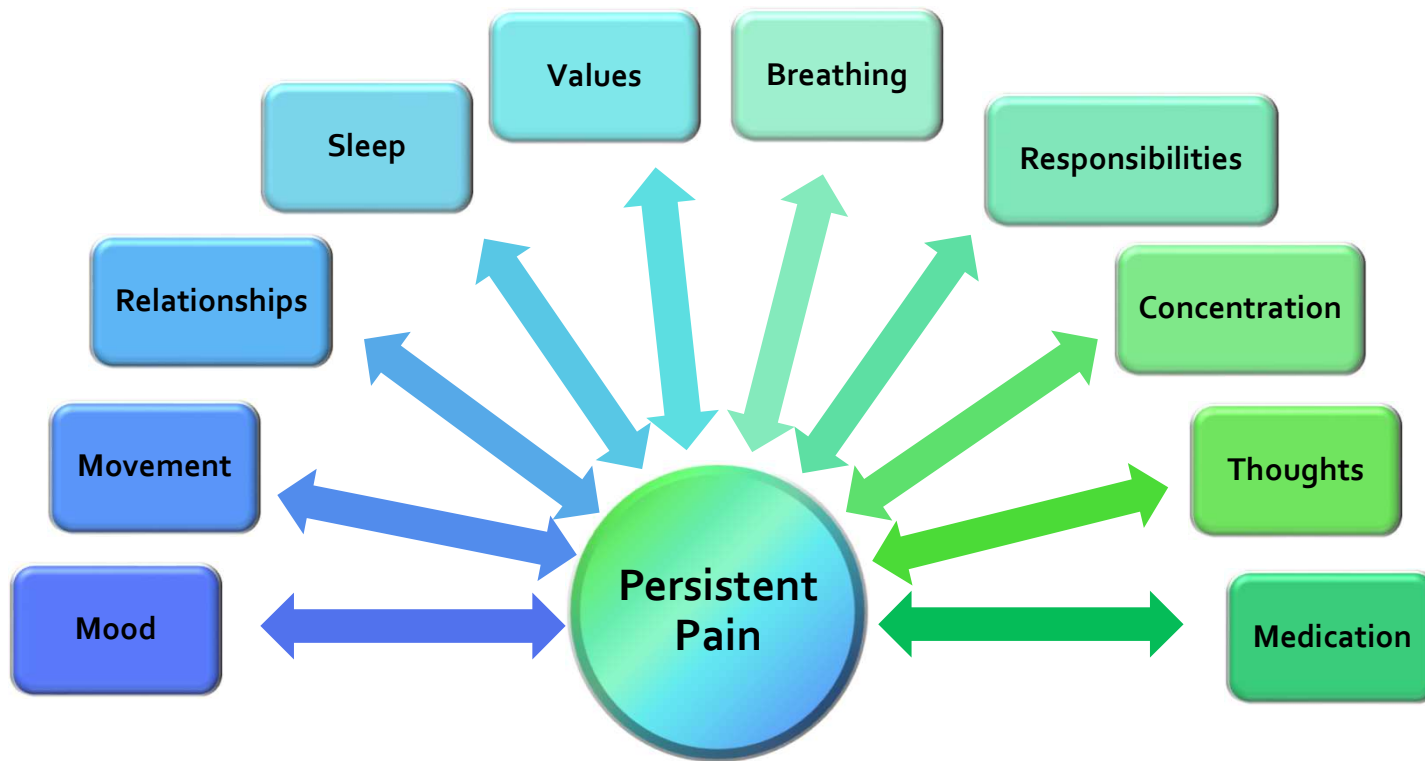




# What We Will Cover Today

- What is stress?
- Stress and our nervous system
- Stress and pain
- Stress management strategies



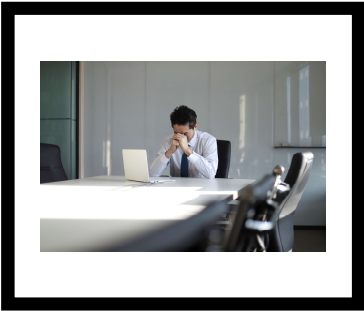


*Adapted from: Biopsychosocial Model of Pain, George Engel 1977*



# What Is Stress?

- Stress is our cognitive, emotional, and physical reaction to anything exciting, upsetting, or unexpected.
- Stress can be a response to a positive or negative event
- Stress can be the result of a major event or minor hassles



# What Is Stress?



Stress can increase pain



Our bodies are equipped to handle acute stress



It is a necessary reaction to protect us



# The Autonomic Nervous System

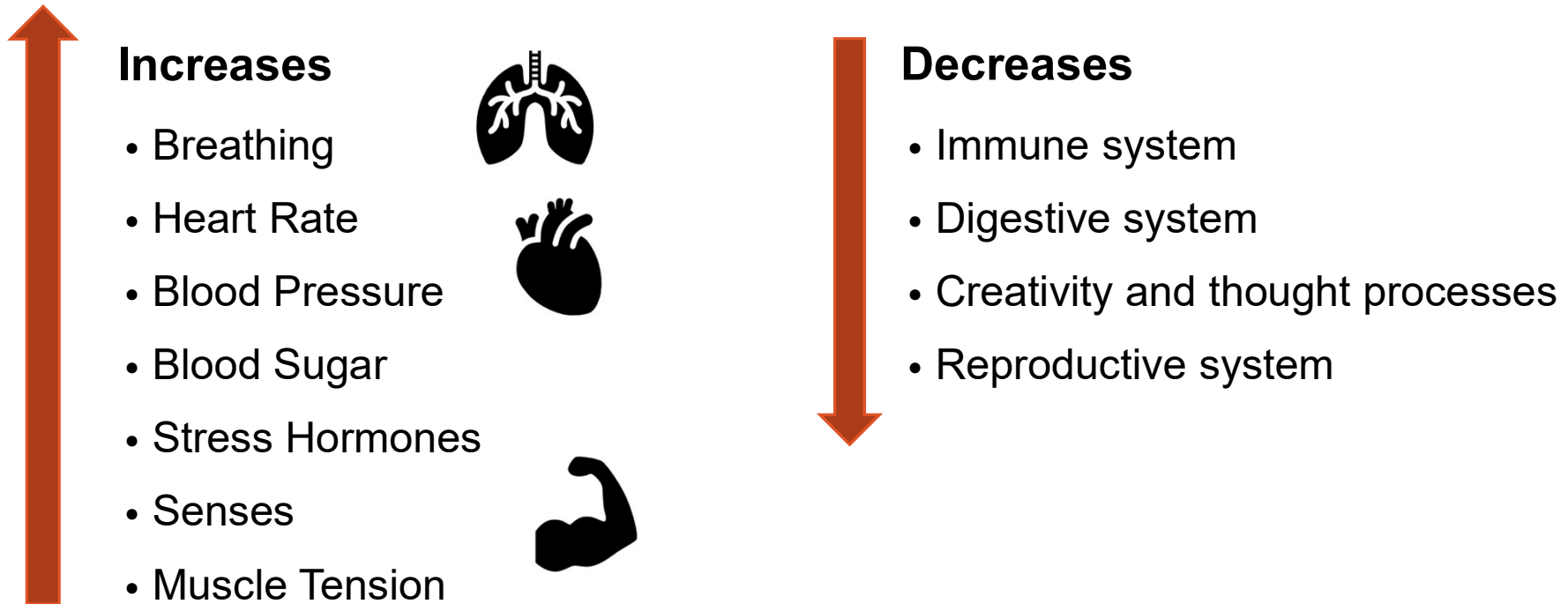
**Sympathetic  
(stress response)**

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**Parasympathetic  
(relaxation  
response)**

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# Nervous System- Stress Response (Sympathetic)



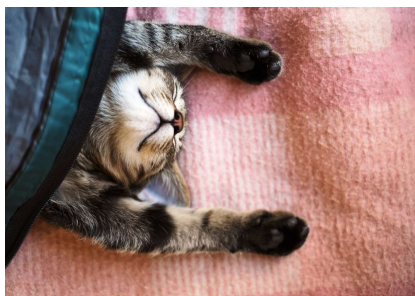
*Adapted from the TAPMI Pain Education Workbook 2019*

# Nervous System- Relaxation Response (Parasympathetic)



## Increases

- Immune system
- Digestive system
- Creativity and thought processes
- Reproductive system



## Decreases

- Breathing
- Heart Rate
- Blood Pressure
- Blood Sugar
- Stress Hormones
- Senses
- Muscle Tension

*Adapted from the TAPMI Pain Education Workbook 2019*

# Acute vs. Chronic Stress

- Acute stress: Equipped to handle
  - Benefits: Bear Example- keeps us safe
  - Risk of not experiencing stress = Bad News Bear!
- Chronic stress – Not equipped to handle
  - Can impact our health and well- being



# Signs of Stress

Tip: Identify your signs + what are the FIRST signs

Physical	Feelings	Cognitive	Behavioural

Physical	Feelings	Cognitive	Behavioural

Place a \*\* beside the first signs you experience.

# How does Chronic Stress Influence Pain?



Increases  
sympathetic nervous  
system activation



Increases  
"danger" sense in  
the body



Increases muscular  
tension

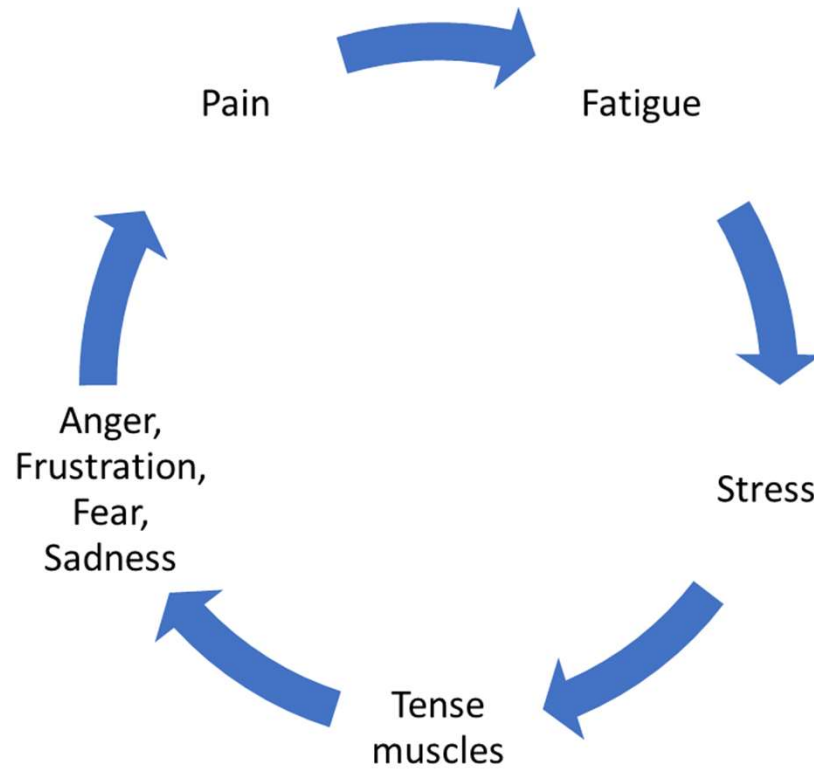


Affects how we  
think and feel about  
pain



Affects our ability to  
use coping  
strategies

# Pain-Stress Cycle



*Adapted from the Arthritis Society Canada 2024*

# In summary

- The stress reaction is meant to be a short-term response
- Maintained activation of our stress response system = body doesn't get a chance to restore itself
- Dials up our pain experience

# Stress Management

## Behavioural / Problem Solving

- Exercise/Pacing\*
- Sleep Strategies\*
- Social Support
- Goal Setting
- DIMS/SIMS

## Mindfulness / Breath-focused

- Mindfulness in every day life
- Name it to Tame it
- Mindful Breathing

## Acceptance / Self- compassion

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy\*
- Compassionate Hand

\* Indicates a workshop available within the MB Pain Program

Tip: Keep Track!

# Listen to your Body

- Listen to what your body needs
- It may be challenging to get into a state of relaxation - this is normal
- Relaxation takes practice
- It may be difficult to relax due to unwanted or unpleasant thoughts, emotions and sensations
  - If you can tolerate these thoughts/emotions/sensations, be a curious observer
  - If you cannot tolerate these thoughts/emotions/sensations, add movement or stop the exercise

# Compassionate Hand

“Self- compassion means treating yourself with the same warmth, caring and kindness that we’d extend to someone we love or deeply care about if they were in similar pain”

Taken from “The Happiness Trap” Dr. Russ Harris



# What's Keeping your Nervous System in High Alert? "DIMS"

Tip: Identify what's keeping you in high alert, so you can address it.

Things you see, hear, smell, taste and touch



Things in your body



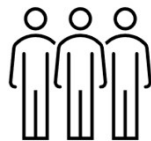
Things you think and believe



Things you say



People in your life



Things you do



Places you go



*Adapted from NOI Group*

# What can calm your nervous system? "SIMS"

Tip: Identify what calms your nervous system, so you can use it.

Things you see, hear, smell,  
taste and touch



Things in your body



Things you think and believe



Things you say



People in your life




Things you do



Places you go



*Adapted from NOI Group*

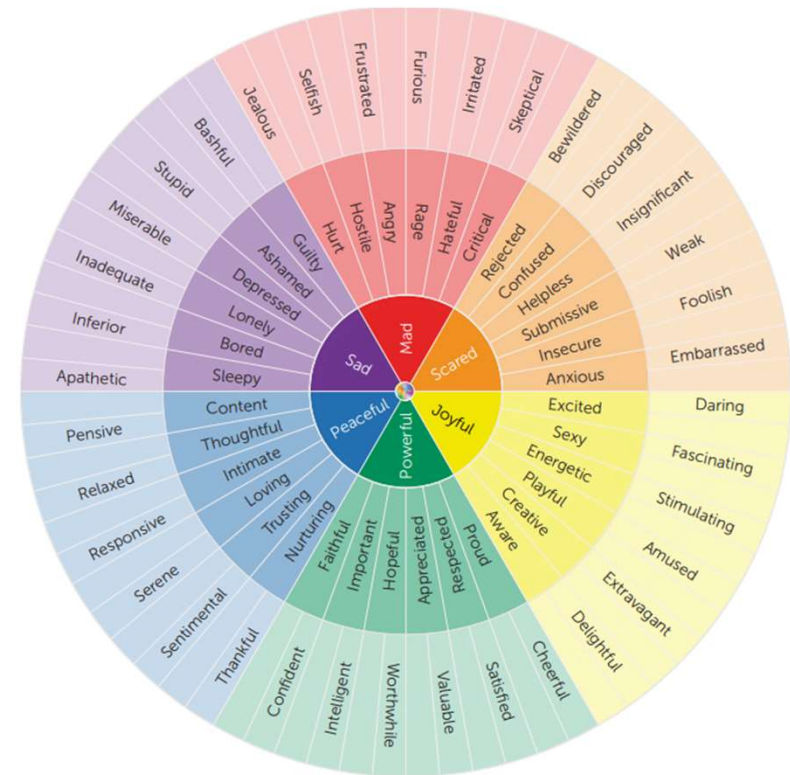
<b>My DIMs and SIMs</b>			<b>My Protectometer</b>
<b>DIMs</b> Danger in Me		<b>SIMs</b> Safety in Me	<p><b>Remember:</b> <i>Anything that makes you feel:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Safer</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Stronger</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Better</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Healthier</i></li> <li>✓ <i>More confident</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Will help your pain level go down and improve your quality of life</i></p> 
	Things I hear, see, smell, taste & touch		
	Things I do		
	Things I say		
	Things I think & believe		
	Places I go		
	People in my life		
	Things happening in my body		

Adapted from Moseley, GL & Butler, D (2015) The Explain Pain Handbook: Protectometer, Adelaide Australia: Noigroup Publications

# Name it to Tame it

Naming our emotions:

- Can decrease our stress reaction
- Can create space
- Helps us figure out what we need
- Helps us communicate our experience to others



The Feeling Wheel  
by Gloria Willcox

# Benefits of Deep Breathing



Moderates pain  
signals



Decreased stress  
reaction



Relaxes mind and  
body



Regulates  
breathing rate



Regulates heart  
rate

# Mindful Breathing



# Review

- Our stress response and relaxation response are **regulated by our nervous system**.
- The stress response is intended to be a **short-term** response; if it continues for a long time, it can affect your overall health.
- Stress can **influence our pain experience**, and pain can contribute to stress.
- There are **several strategies** that you can use to help encourage the relaxation response in your body and/or to address the stressors themselves.
- Strategies take practice and may be challenging at first. **This is normal.**

## Stress Management

What strategy did you use?	When did you use it?	What did you notice?

# Optional Next Steps



**Practice the Strategies discussed today**



**Access these online resources:**

- Pain U Online (TAPMI) Stress Management module  
[Stress Management | Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute \(TAPMI\)](#)
- Live Plan Be+  
[LivePlanBe+](#)



## Optional Next Steps (Continued)



### **Power over Pain Webinars:**

- Exploring Mindfulness: Foundations of Meditation

<https://vimeo.com/1073324747?fl=pl&fe=sh>

- Mood Matters: Unravelling the Connections Between Emotions and Pain

<https://vimeo.com/951169923?fl=pl&fe=sh>

- Pain is Stressful

<https://vimeo.com/877146484?fl=pl&fe=sh>



### **Ask for referral to the ACT or Self Compassion group**

**Request individual referral in Community or  
through the Pain Clinic**

# Upcoming Workshops



**ACTing on Persistent Pain**

**Thursday September 18, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 pm**

**Lets Talk About it- Effective Communication and Persistent Pain**

**Thursday October 9, 2025**

**Reframing Exercise and Persistent Pain**

**Thursday October 16, 2025 from 1:00-2:30**

If you are unable to attend in person, refer to the handout for virtual dates offered through HSC

**Low Energy and Persistent Pain: What Can You Do About It?**

**Thursday October 30, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 p.m.**

**Access the calendar at:**

**Patient Resources - Pan Am Clinic ([www.panamclinic.org/patient-resources/](http://www.panamclinic.org/patient-resources/))**



**QUESTIONS?**

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- NOI group- DIMs and SIMs: <https://www.noigroup.com/noijam/dim-sims/>
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- The American Heart Foundation (July 7th, 2023) It's not just inspiration – careful breathing can help your health <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2023/07/07/its-not-just-inspiration-careful-breathing-can-help-your-health>
- Pain BC Pain Foundations Course for Allied Health Professionals: <https://painbc.ca/pain-foundations>
- Mimi O'Connor Love & Support The Science Behind Why Naming Our Feelings Makes Us Happier: [The Science Behind Why Naming our Feelings Makes us Happier – 'Ekahi Ornish Lifestyle Medicine](#)