



# Reframing Exercise and Persistent Pain

An Evidence-Based Modern Approach  
Developed for the Manitoba Pain Care Program

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## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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
- No recording
- Please silence your phones



# Housekeeping

- You may print off/download the presentation at:  
[panamclinic.org/patient-resources/](http://panamclinic.org/patient-resources/)
- This session provides information and recommended strategies for pain self-management that applies to *most* individuals/ persistent pain conditions . It may not meet the needs of those seeking more specific or detailed information about their unique concerns or pain condition.



# Outline & Objectives



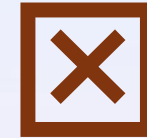
Discuss persistent pain and exercise



Compare exercise for fitness vs. exercise for pain



Discuss exercise responses and risks

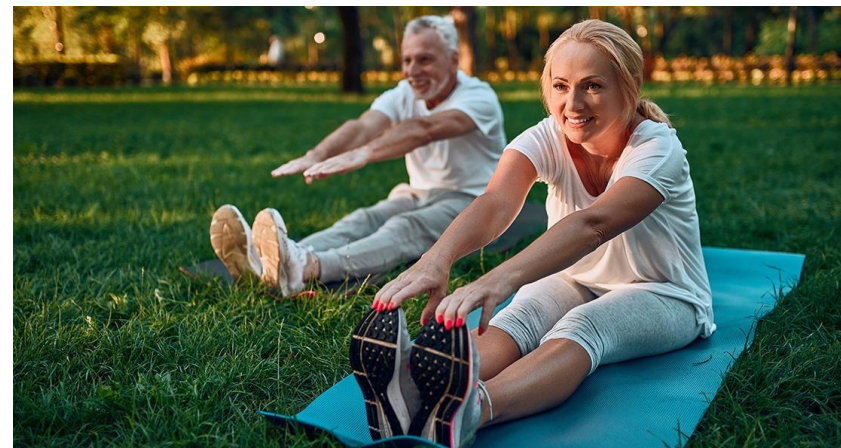


Resolve common misbeliefs about exercise and pain



Learn how to get started and how to adapt an exercise

# What is Exercise?



# Why Exercise?

- Improves mood
- Improves sleep
- Improves cardiovascular health
- Decreases risk of falls
- Improves bone mineral density
- Increases energy
- Improves function and performance
- Aids in weight management
- Improves metabolic health
- Improves memory
- Stress management

"If exercise were a pill, it would be the most widely prescribed medicine in the world"



# Exercise is Medicine

23 ½ Hours: What is the Single Best Thing We Can Do for Our Health?

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**OBESITY  
+ NO EXER**

A hand holding a black marker is shown writing the words 'OBESITY' and '+ NO EXER' on a whiteboard. The text is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The hand is positioned at the bottom right of the text, with the marker tip pointing towards the end of the second line. The whiteboard is framed by two horizontal lines, one above and one below the text.

# What is Pain?

- Pain is an alarm system in our body
- Protects us from injury or further tissue damage
- Survival mechanism
  - Life expectancy of people who cannot feel pain
  - 25 years
- Types:
  - Acute
  - Persistent



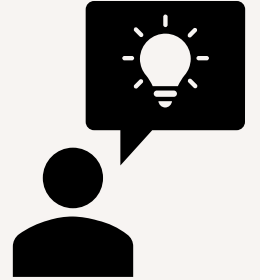


# Persistent Pain

- When the alarm system is frequently triggered
- NOT always an accurate measure of tissue health or tolerance
  
- *Not “abnormal”*
  - Suboptimal
  - 1 in 5 Canadians have persistent pain – 20% of our population
  
- *We see system issues like this all over our body*
  - Immune system, digestive system, nervous system
  - Are allergies abnormal?

**Mental health**

**Activity**



**Self- reflection:  
What increases your pain?**

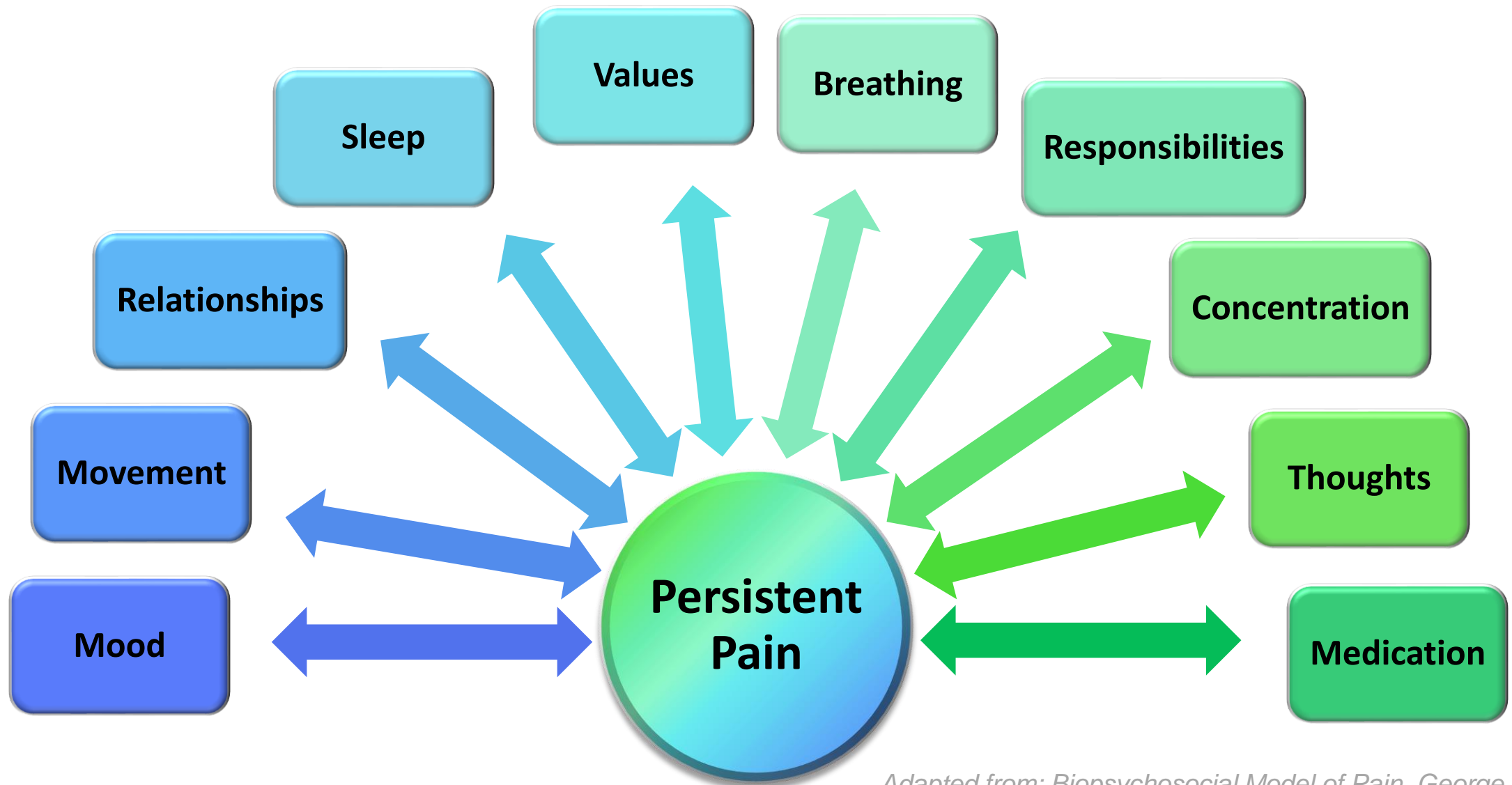
**Fatigue**

**Stress**

**Fears and Worries**



# Persistent Pain is COMPLEX!

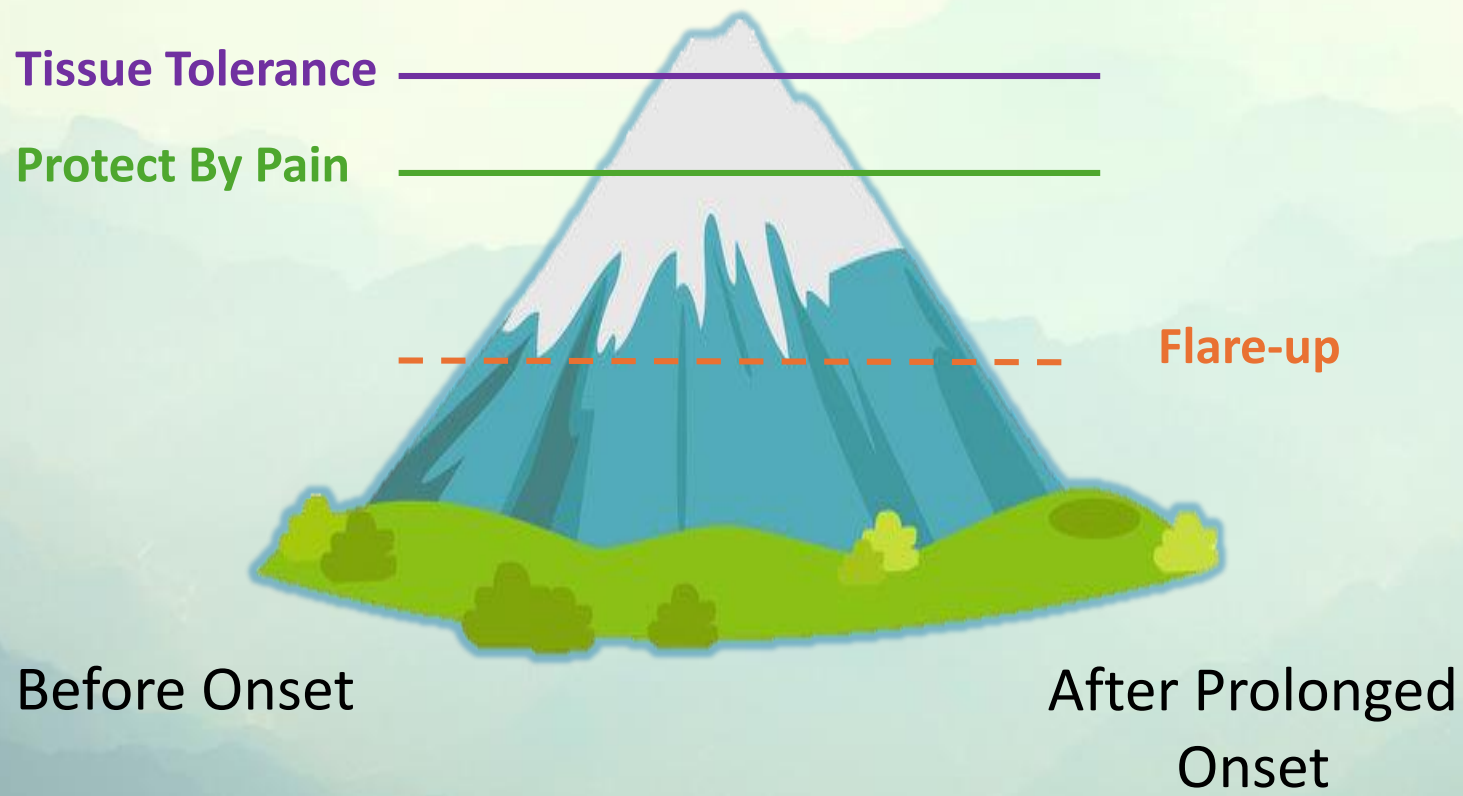


# Movement Snack



# Pain Responses

**Pain Does Not Always = Injury**



# How Pain Progresses



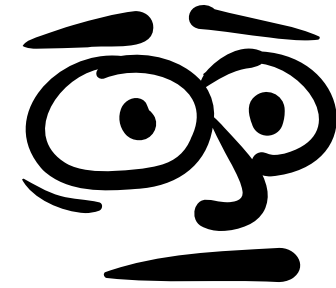
# Optimal Movement

The solution **IS NOT:**

- Complete rest and avoidance of activities
- Ignoring or pushing through pain

The solution **IS:**

- Optimal movement



*Fear is not the Answer!*



# What are our goals when doing exercise for pain?

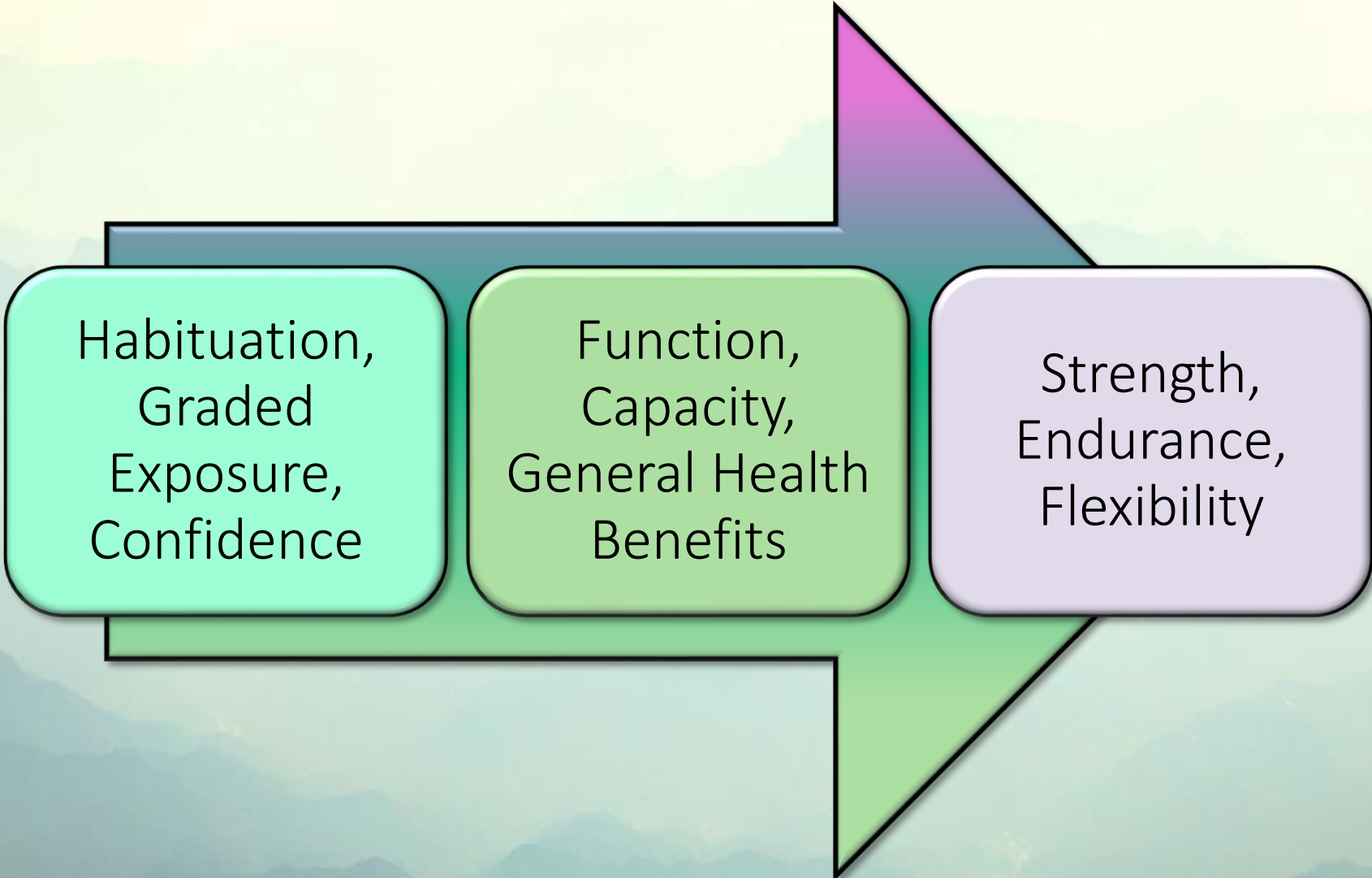
## Fitness Goals

- Improve endurance
- Improve strength
- Improve flexibility
- Improve balance
- Improve performance

## Pain Goals

- Improve activity tolerance
- Improve tissue health
- Build confidence
- Create new habits
- Improved function
- General health benefits

# Targets of Rehabilitation

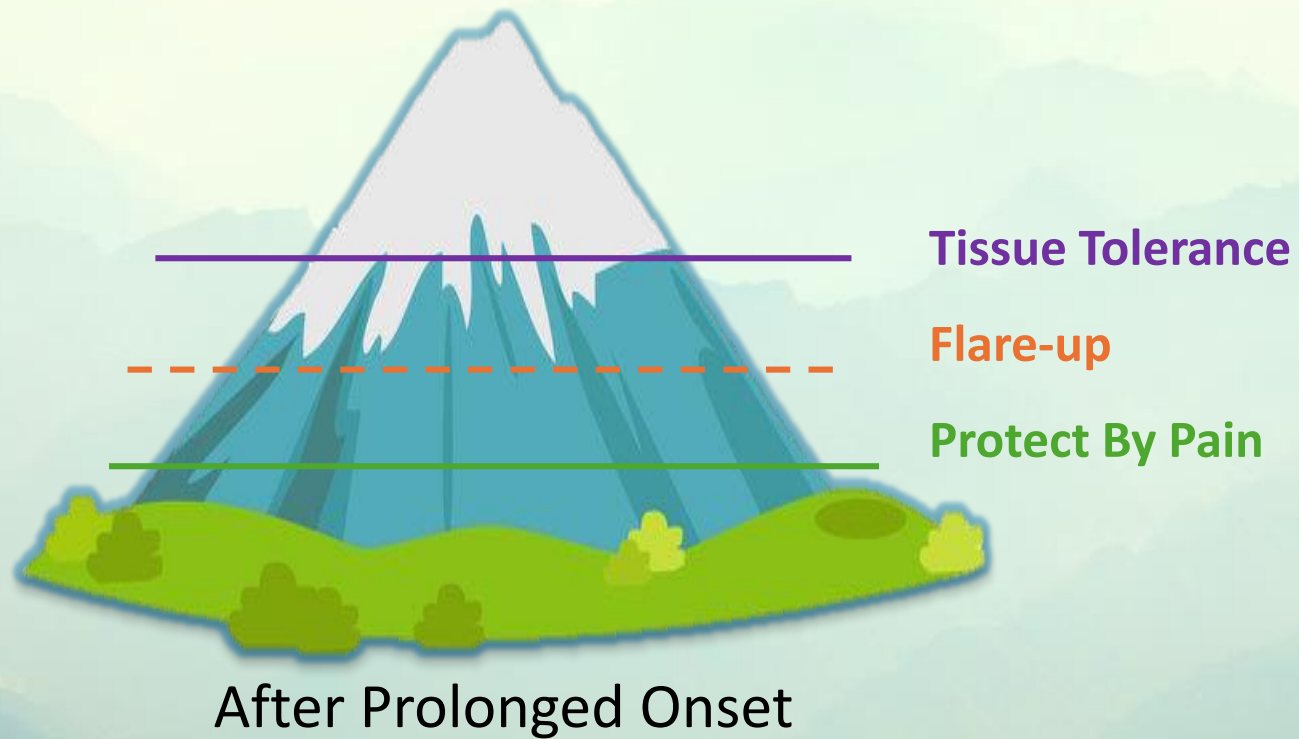


Habituation,  
Graded  
Exposure,  
Confidence

Function,  
Capacity,  
General Health  
Benefits

Strength,  
Endurance,  
Flexibility

# How Exercise Can Help



# Direct Benefits to Activity

Improved Quality  
of Life and Function

Reconditioning

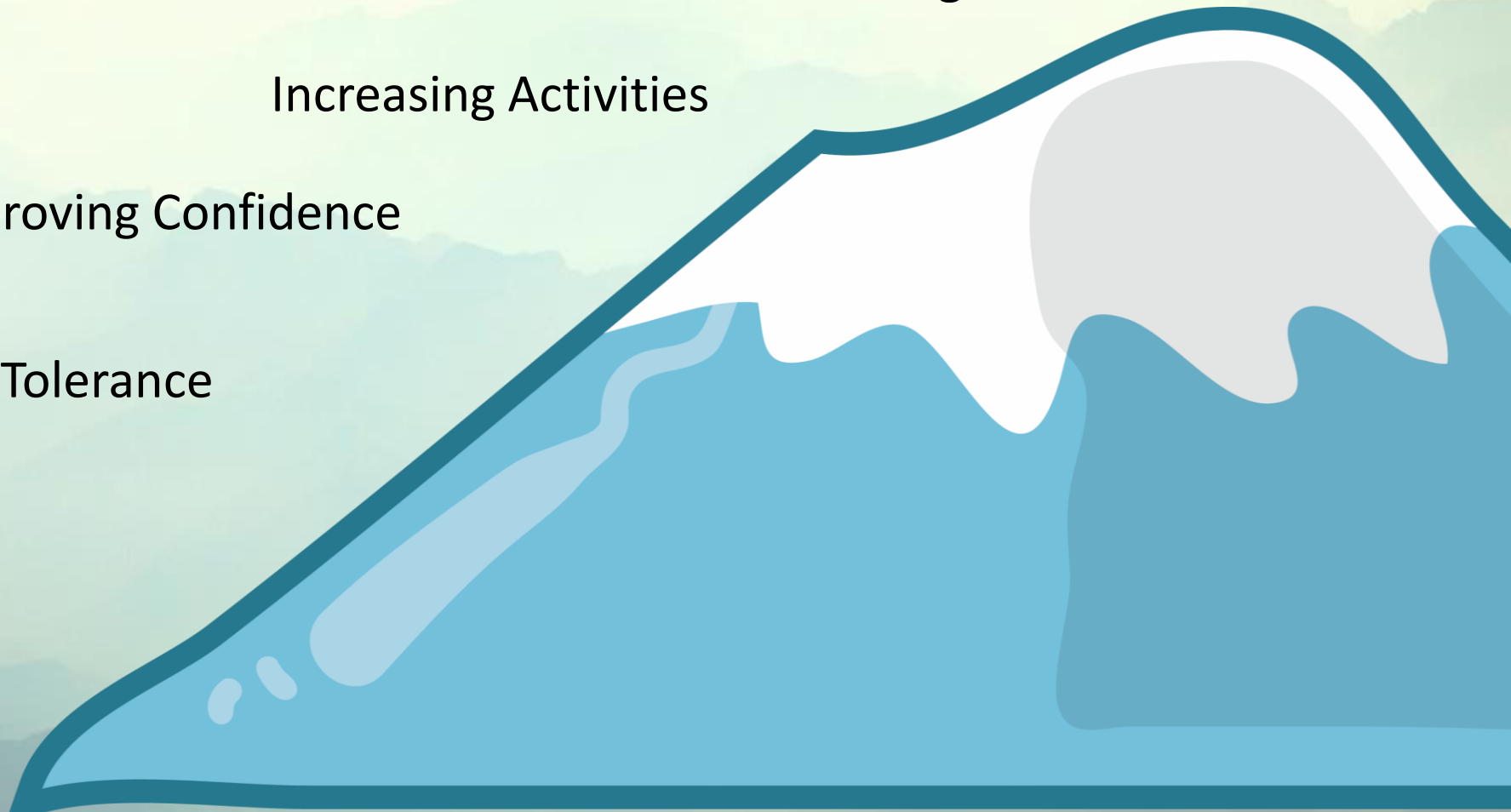
Increasing Activities

Improving Confidence

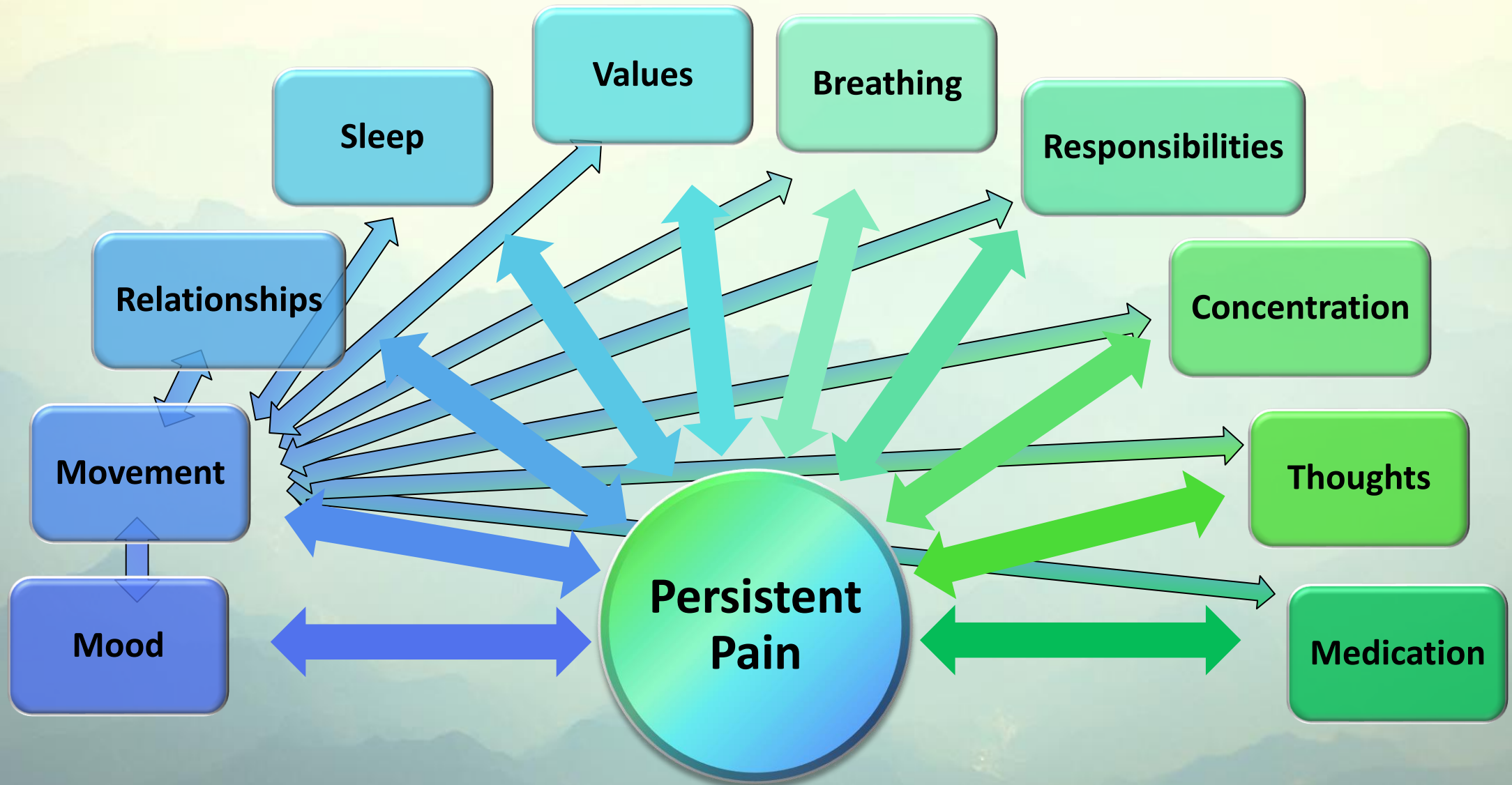
Building Tolerance

Learning &  
Understanding Your Pain

Life Modified by  
Pain



# Indirect benefits to Activity



# Pain with Activity- What Is OK?

## Comfortable Pain

vs.

## Uncomfortable Pain



- Tolerable
- Goes back to baseline within minutes/few hours

- Makes you "wince"
- Persists into the next day
- Doesn't mean injury – just too much too soon

**Goal:** Modify uncomfortable activity until it becomes comfortable (50% of intensity/duration)



# Normal Responses to Exercise



Fatigue

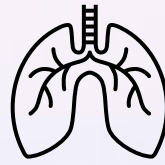


Muscle symptoms:

- Pulling
- Burning
- Pulsing
- Soreness



Increase  
heart rate



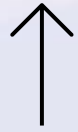
Increase  
breathing  
rate



Feeling warm  
or sweating



Joint clicks,  
cracks or pops



Mild increase  
in symptoms

# Abnormal Responses to Exercise



Rapid heart rate  
"Flutter"  
Chest pain  
Sudden upper back pain



Muscle cramp  
"Charley-horse"

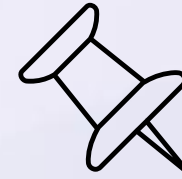
NEW onsets



Dizzy  
Light-headed



Headache



Numbness  
Tingling  
Pins & needles



Nausea

*Stop. Rest.  
Take nitro spray.  
Seek help if needed.*

# Recovering Movement in Persistent Pain

Move to the edge of increased pain (or choose a slightly challenging activity)



Ask yourself: Is it OK for my body to do this activity? Will I be OK later?

Stay at the edge while you do these 3 things....

1

Keep your breath as calm as you can

2

Keep Your Body and Muscle Tension low

3

Monitor the pain. Do not ignore it, or pay too much attention to it.



# How do I get started?

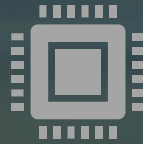
Consider the G.R.O.W. framework:



## Goal

What do you want to achieve?

What do I want to achieve in the long term?  
Why is this goal important to me?



## Reality

What can you do now?

What is my current situation related to this goal?  
What have I already tried, and what were the results?  
What resources/support do I have?



## Options

Tools, knowledge, support, equipment, etc.

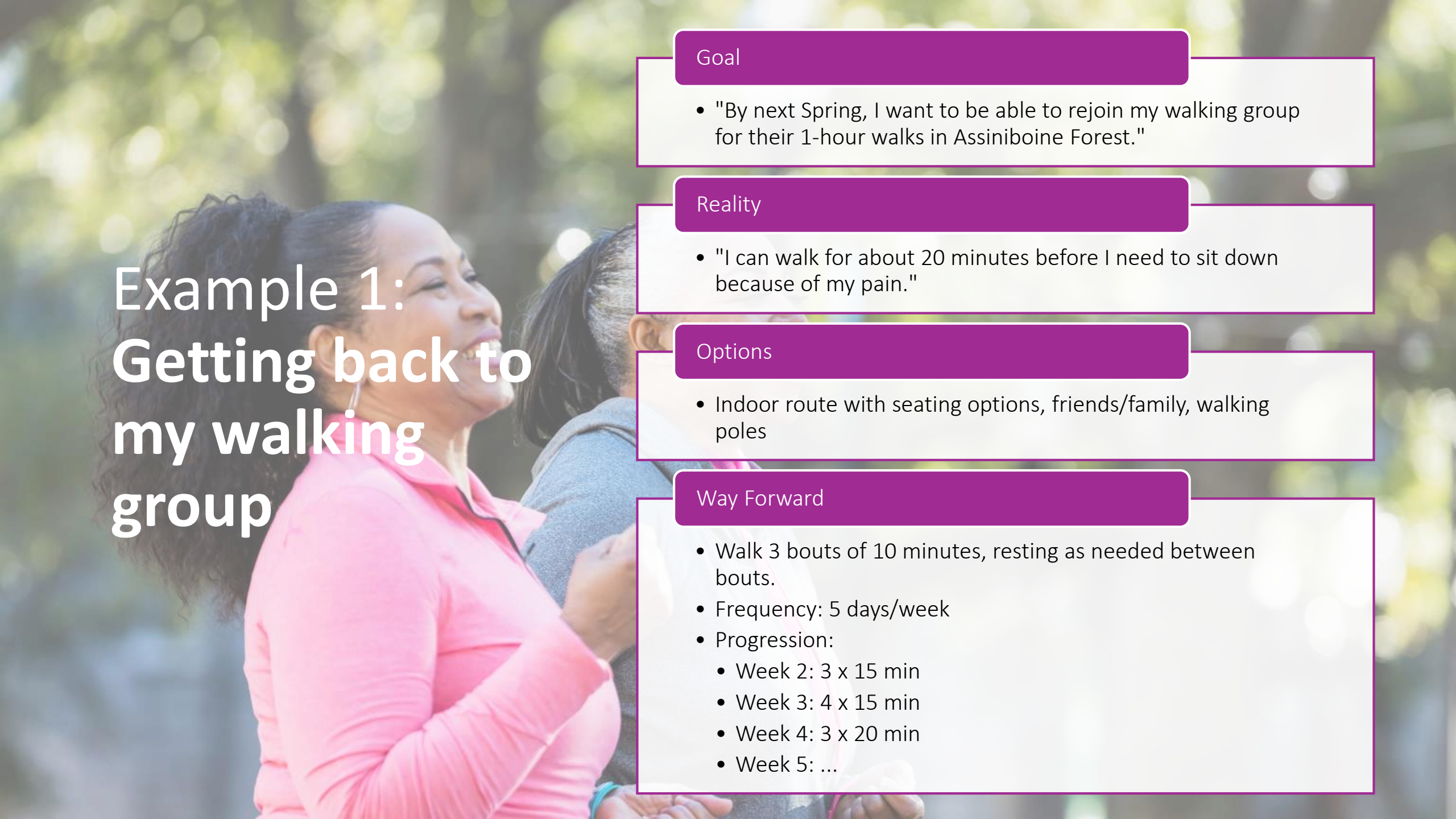
What are all the possible ways I could achieve this goal?  
What option seems most feasible and effective?



## Way Forward

Find an entry point and begin moving towards goal.

What specific actions will I take to move towards my goal?  
When will I start and what is the timeline?  
How will I stay motivated and accountable?



# Example 1: Getting back to my walking group

## Goal

- "By next Spring, I want to be able to rejoin my walking group for their 1-hour walks in Assiniboine Forest."

## Reality

- "I can walk for about 20 minutes before I need to sit down because of my pain."

## Options

- Indoor route with seating options, friends/family, walking poles

## Way Forward

- Walk 3 bouts of 10 minutes, resting as needed between bouts.
- Frequency: 5 days/week
- Progression:
  - Week 2: 3 x 15 min
  - Week 3: 4 x 15 min
  - Week 4: 3 x 20 min
  - Week 5: ...



## Example 2: Feeling strong & confident

### Goal

- "I want to be feel strong and confident in my back when I lift my kids into their car seats."

### Reality

- "I can confidently lift up to 10lbs, but often when I lift heavier it leads to a flare-up (so I tend to avoid it)."

### Options

- Dumbbells & kettlebells at home, access to community gym, online exercise demos

### Way Forward

- Exercise: Deadlift (floor to waist lift)
- Dosage: 10lbs x 2-4 sets of 6-12 reps, keeping at least 2 reps in reserve
- Frequency: 3 days/week
- Progression:
  - Each session, increase by 1-2 reps or 1 set until you are completing 4 sets of 12
  - Then add load, but reduce reps/sets

# Remember.....



- Pain is a moving target, so practice will be needed to begin to succeed.
- Every time you succeed with this, even a little, you are creating positive changes in your body and brain.



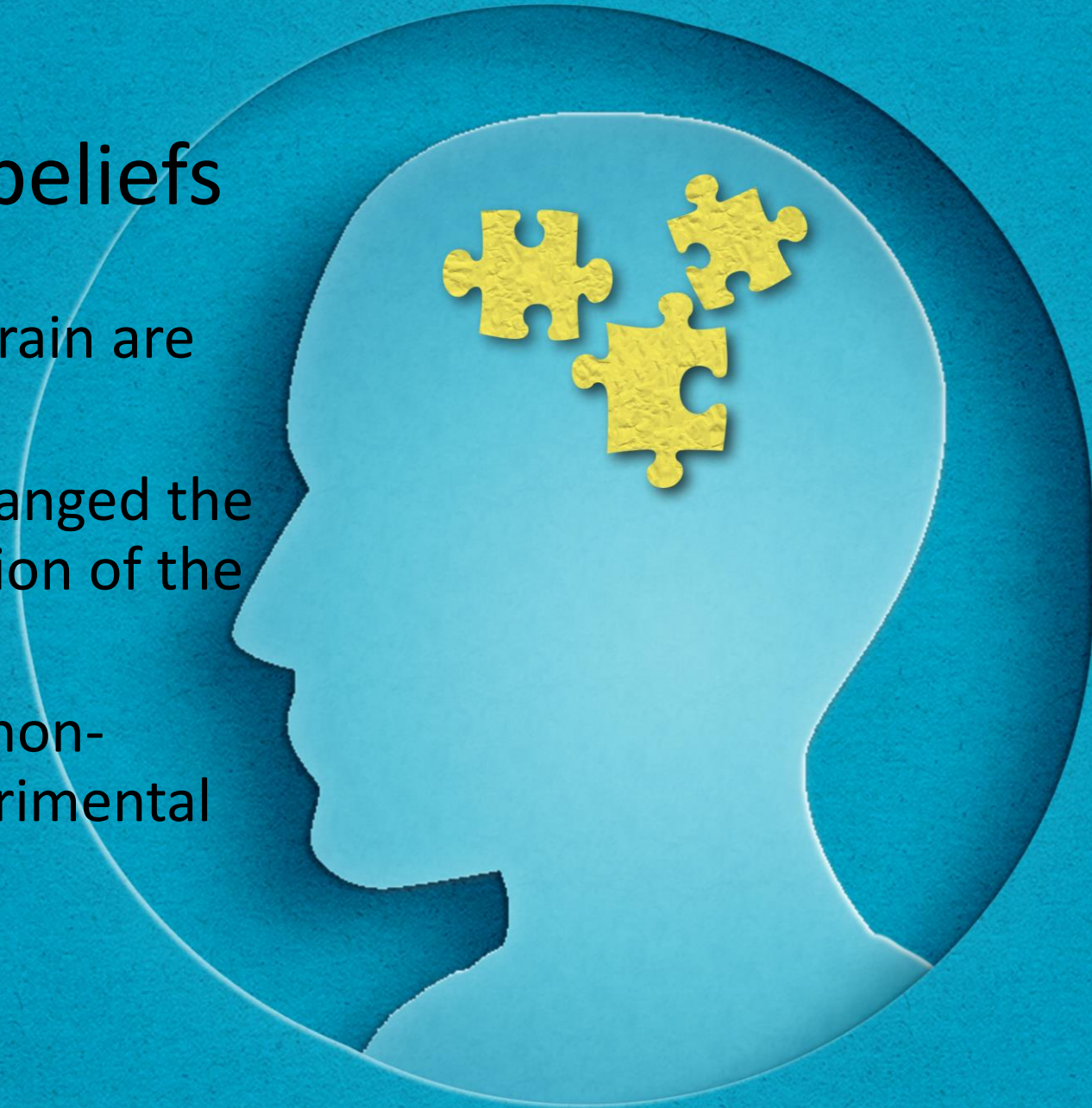
# Movement Snack



# Common Misbeliefs

MYTH: The body and brain are non- adaptable

- New evidence has changed the way we view adaptation of the body and brain
- Viewing the body as non- adaptable can be detrimental to one's recovery



# Common Misbeliefs

The following are things that we don't need to worry about as much when starting to exercise with persistent pain.



# ~~“Bad Posture”~~

- ~~• Having perfect posture will get rid of my pain~~
- No one has perfect posture all the time
- Sustained postures can become sensitized
- “Your next posture is your best posture”



# ~~“Imbalance”~~

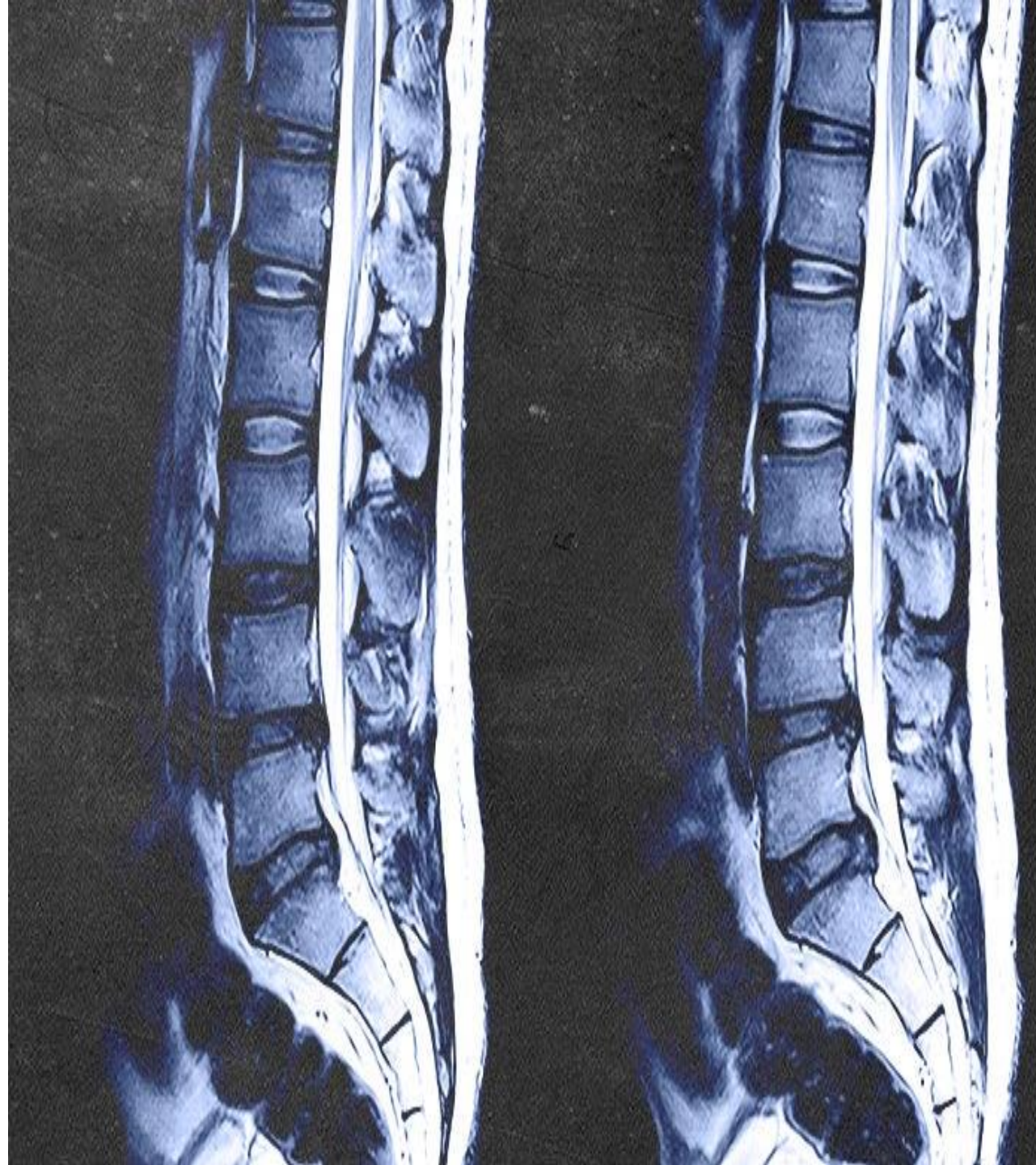
- ~~• Muscles must be balanced and symmetrical to function properly~~
- Many examples of human resiliency and adaptability
- Asymmetry is the norm!



# “Unstable Spine”

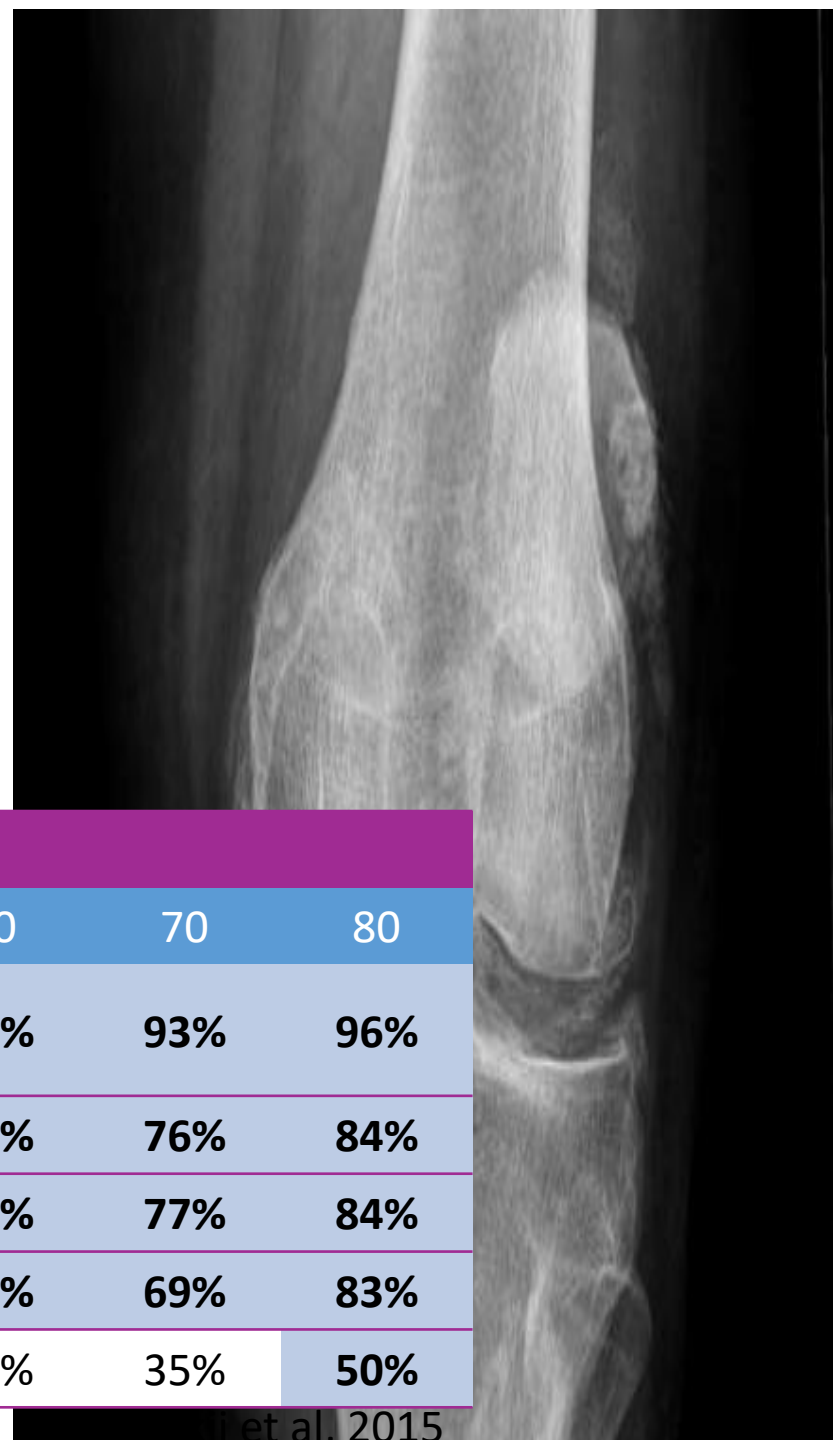
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- ~~• You must stabilize your spine to improve pain.~~
- Having a strong "core" is a good thing to have, however it is **NOT** predictive of back pain
- People with chronic back pain tend to have overactive core muscles



# ~~“Wear and Tear”~~

- ~~Your pain is from wear and tear and exercise will wear it down more.~~
- Wear and Repair* - Exercise can help tissues **adapt**
- Wrinkles on the inside* - **Majority** of people have aging changes and are pain free

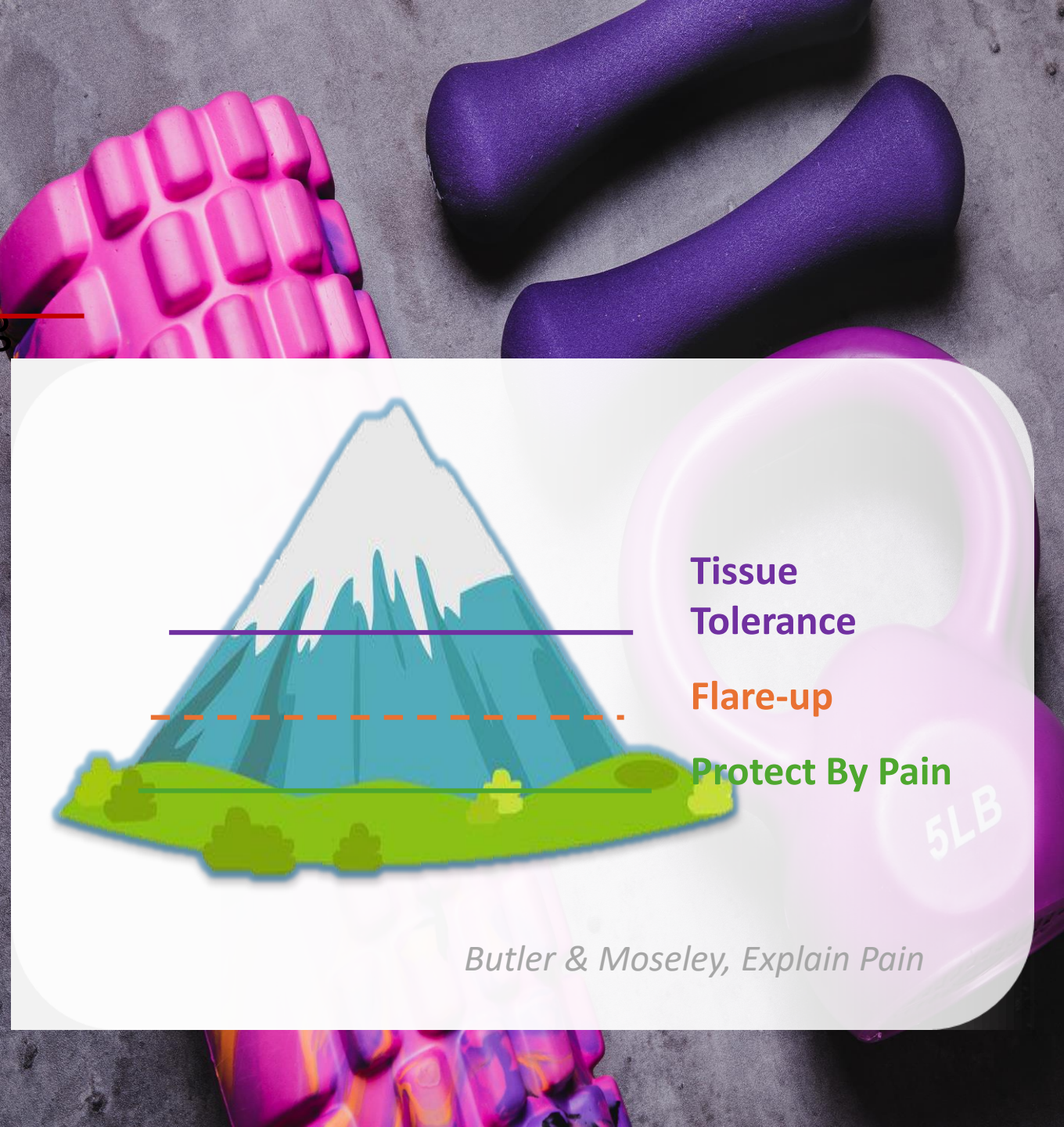
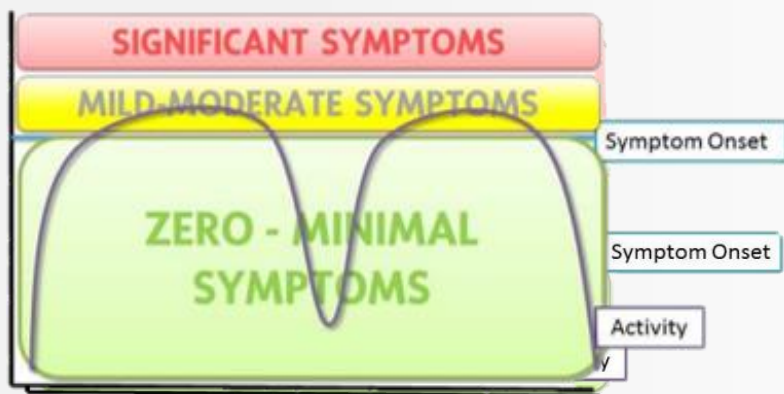


ASYMPTOMATIC

Imaging Finding	Age						
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Disc degeneration	37%	<b>52%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>96%</b>
Disc height loss	24%	34%	45%	<b>56%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>84%</b>
Disc bulge	30%	40%	<b>50%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>84%</b>
Facet degeneration	4%	9%	18%	32%	<b>50%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>83%</b>
Spondylolisthesis	3%	5%	8%	14%	23%	35%	<b>50%</b>

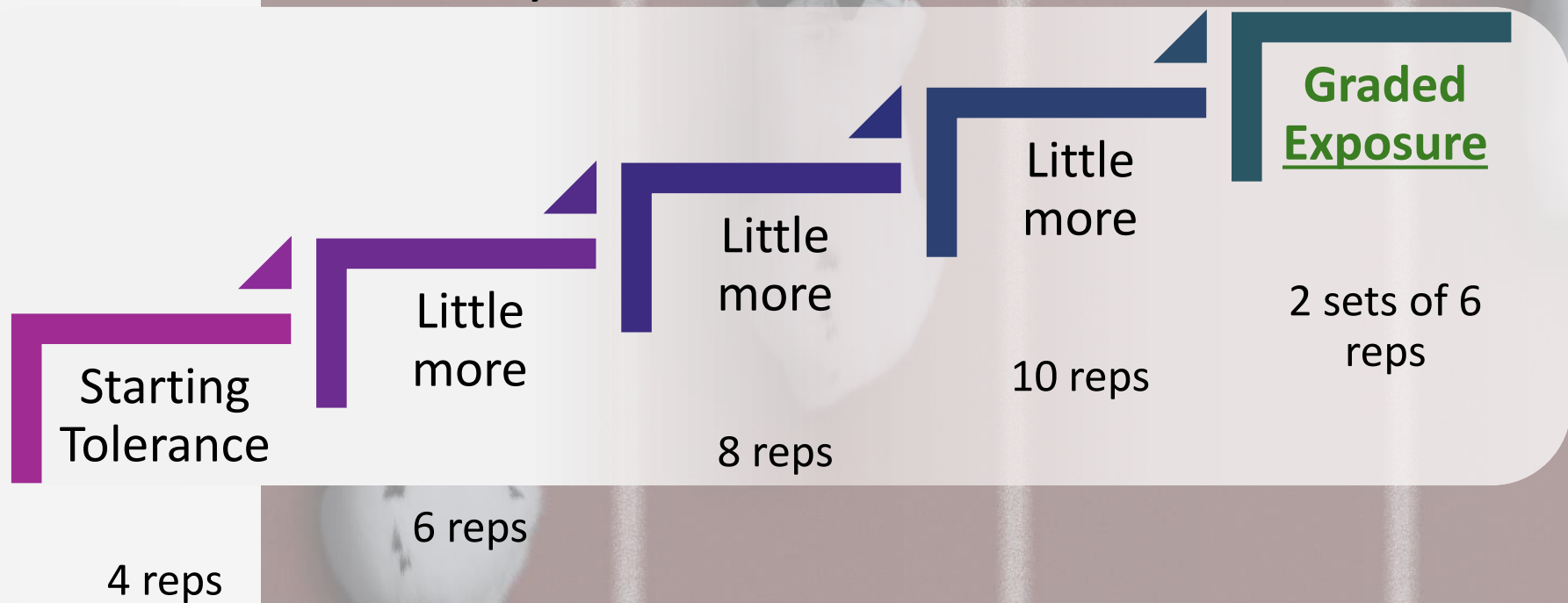
# ~~"No Pain, No Gain"~~

- ~~You must feel pain when exercising to make progress~~
- It can be **SAFE** to feel pain with activity, but it is not required and NOT the goal
- Exercise **below the Flare-Up** line



# ~~"3 sets of 10 repetitions"~~

- ~~• You must exercise a certain amount for it to be beneficial~~
- Can lead to flare ups
- It doesn't matter how small you start

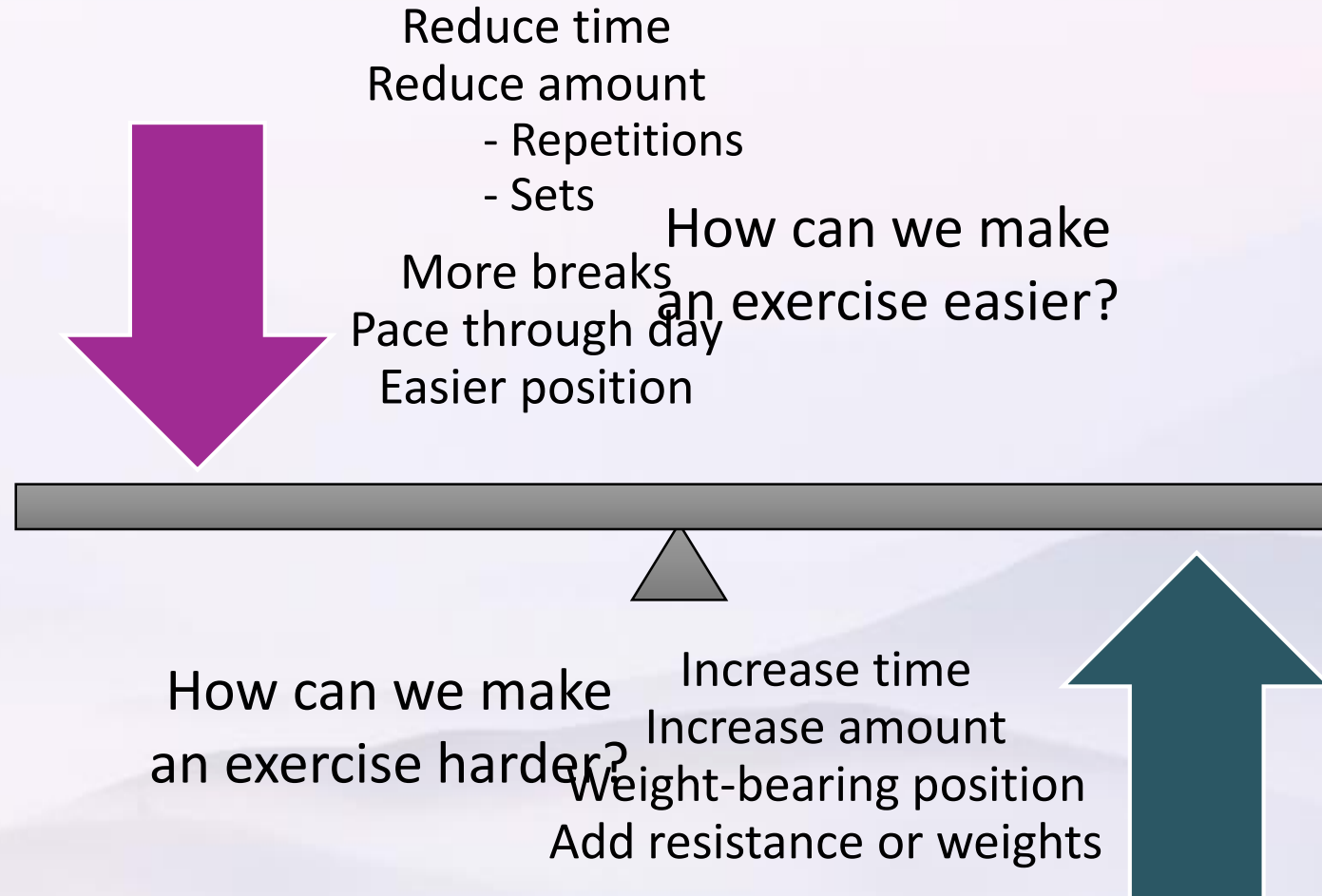


# Slow and Steady

- Start low and build up slowly to prevent flare-ups
- Think millimeters instead of kilometers!
- Increase by no more than 10% per week

Week Number	Amount of Activity
1	10 minutes
2	11 minutes
3	12 minutes
4	13.5 minutes
5	14.5 minutes
6	16 minutes
7	18 minutes

# Adapting an Exercise



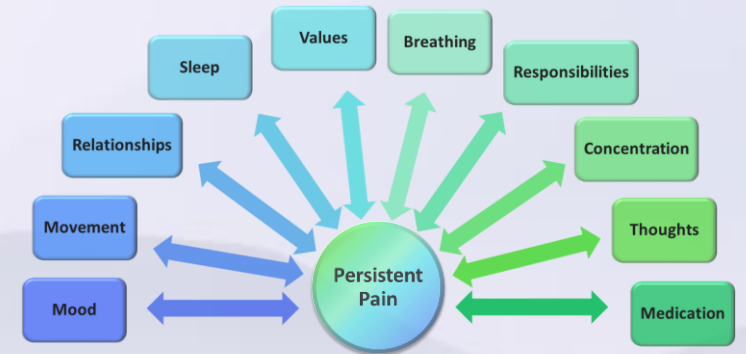
# Exercise Take Home Message

- Change positions
- Focus on consistency
- Remember your body is stable, and it's okay to have age related changes
- Let your symptoms guide your intensity, not a number
- Start small and progress slowly



# Combining Strategies

- Consider combining other strategies when exercising
  - Deep breathing
  - Energy conservation strategies
  - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) strategies
  - Timing with pain medication
- For more information on these strategies:
  - Visit Power Over Pain Portal
  - Attend these Workshops offered by the Manitoba Pain Care Program
    - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy workshop
    - Low Energy and Persistent Pain: What Can you Do About It?



# Upcoming Workshops

- **Low Energy and Persistent Pain**
  - Thursday, October 30th, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
- **Stress You Can! Strategies to Manage and Live with Stress**
  - Thursday, November 6th, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 pm
- **ACTing on Persistent Pain**
  - Thursday, November 20th, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 pm

**\*\*If you are unable to attend in person, please check the handout for virtual dates available through HSC Pain Clinic.**

You may access the calendar at [www.panamclinic.org/patient-resources/](http://www.panamclinic.org/patient-resources/)

# Next Steps

- Practice the Strategies Discussed today
- Access the Resources provided in today's handout (also available on the Pan Am website):

[www.panamclinic.or/pateint-resources/](http://www.panamclinic.or/pateint-resources/)

- "Life Lift" Group Exercise Class (referral required)
- If still needing Individual assistance, you may request a referral to physiotherapy (Community based or Pain clinic)

## Persistent Pain Self-Management

### Exercise Resources

#### Power over Pain Portal



Poweroverpain.ca

Power Over Pain is a direct response to Health Canada's [Action Plan for Pain in Canada](#). It is an online [platform](#) and the goal is to provide access to free resources in a **one-stop shop**. Resources include articles, videos, podcasts, courses, workshops, and peer support. There are also links to national and provincial services for health advice/counseling from healthcare professionals. You can create a free account that allows you to keep track of your progress and learning.

Click on "Resources" under the "Information Hub" tab at the top of the main page. Click on "Movement" on the left-hand side of the page to filter to movement-based resources.

#### Recommended Movement resources

- Physical Activity by Pain U Online
- Pacing Physical Activity by Pain U Online
- Living Engaged and Actively with Pain
- Gentle Movement at Home
- Simple Stretches

#### Local Resources

##### YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg

[Home | YMCA Canada](#)

The YMCA-YWCA offers a Member Access Program available to people whose financial situation limits their ability to participate in the Y's programs.

##### Branch contact numbers:

**Downtown:** 204.947.3044

**Elmwood-Kildonan:** 204.668.8140

**South:** 204.233.3476

**West Portage:** 204.889.8052

##### Winnipeg Leisure Guide programs

<http://www.winnipeg.ca/cms/recreation/leisure/leisureguide.stm>

The City of Winnipeg produces two seasonal guides offering recreational opportunities for citizens. They also offer a Recreation Services Fee Subsidy Program for those with financial difficulties. ([Recreation Fee Assistance Program | City of Winnipeg](#))

Phone: 311

##### Winnipeg in Motion

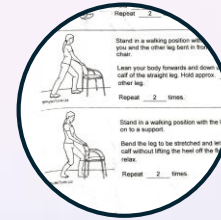
[Winnipeg in motion](#)

This site will provide you with tips and tools to add more physical activity to your day. It includes activity guidelines for various ages and local resources for where and how you can be more active (community centers, fitness facilities, cycling routes, walking groups, parks and trails).

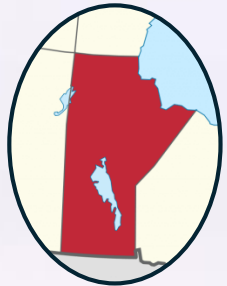
# Next Steps: Where to Find Exercises



Power Over Pain Portal



Previous physiotherapy exercises



Pain Clinic physiotherapy



WRHA or Community group classes



Fitness Center group classes

# Next Steps: Power over Pain Portal



[Sign In](#)

[Create an account](#)

[In crisis? Get help now](#)

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[Support](#)

[Information Hub](#)

[Events](#)

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Power  
Over  
Pain  
is possible.

Your Portal, *always*  
*free.*

[Watch: Welcome Message  
& Portal Walkthrough](#)



# Next Steps: Power over Pain Portal Offerings

## Recommended Movement resources

- Physical Activity by Pain U Online
- Pacing Physical Activity by Pain U Online
- Living Engaged and Actively with Pain
- Gentle Movement at Home
- Simple Stretches



## Past Recorded Workshops

- How to Modify Activity for Chronic Pain Management (June 16, 2025)  
<https://vimeo.com/1096047804?fl=pl&fe=sh>
- Exercise with Chronic/Persistent Pain (May 8, 2025)  
<https://vimeo.com/1084363956?fl=pl&fe=sh>
- Move to Improve: Harnessing Movement for Chronic Pain Relief (December 10, 2024)  
<https://vimeo.com/1038742557?fl=pl&fe=sh>
- Back to Movement (February 7, 2024)  
<https://vimeo.com/917294556?fl=pl&fe=sh>
- Body Mapping: Exercises to release tension from top-down (November 9, 2023)  
<https://vimeo.com/887336793?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Filter

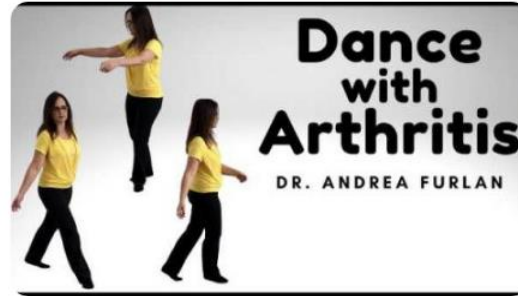
Clear all

TOPICS

- Indigenous
- Mindfulness
- Mood
- Movement**
- Nutrition
- Pain
- Pain and Surgery
- Sleep
- Stress
- Substance Use

CONTENT TYPE

- Articles
- Phone Services
- Podcasts
- Self-directed Courses
- Support Groups



### The Amazing Benefits of Dance for Arthritis, Pain and Seniors

View this 12-minute video by Dr. Andrea Furlan, pain physician from Toronto, as she demonstrates how to dance bolero, a Spanish-originated style, as you manage pain and arthritis.

[Learn More](#)

[Access resource](#)



### Physical Activity by Pain U Online



## Physical Activity

Physical Activity, Pacing, and Exercises

IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WHEN IT HURTS

PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

TYPES OF EXERCISES

SMART BODY MECHANICS

SETTING ACTIVITY GOALS

CONCLUSIONS

1

### The Importance of Physical Exercise

When living with chronic pain it can be easy to stop participating in activity and exercise. Inactivity causes us to gradually lose strength and flexibility. We then find ourselves out of the habit of exercising, which ultimately causes pain levels to increase. Regular physical activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive will aim to improve or maintain physical fitness.



In this module you will learn about:

2. Click on "Movement" filter

# How to Access Movement Resources

1. Go to "Resources" under "Information Hub" tab

# How to Access Workshops

1. Click on "Recordings" under "Events" tab

The screenshot shows a website interface with a navigation bar at the top. The 'Events' tab is highlighted in yellow. Below the navigation bar is a large blue banner with the word 'Events' in white. Underneath the banner, there are three tabs: 'Upcoming Events', 'Watch Past Workshops' (highlighted in yellow), and 'National Pain Awareness Week'. The main content area displays a workshop listing for 'How to Modify Activity for Chronic Pain Management' on June 16, 2025, presented by Sarah Sheffe, OT Reg. (Ont.) Occupational Therapist. The listing includes a video player with a play button and a description of the workshop content. Logos for TAPMI and Women's College Hospital are visible at the bottom of the listing.

Home About ▾ Communities ▾ Support ▾ Information Hub ▾ **Events ▾** EN | FR

## Events

Upcoming Events **Watch Past Workshops** National Pain Awareness Week

### How to Modify Activity for Chronic Pain Management

June 16, 2025

**Adapting activity when you have chronic pain**

Sarah Sheffe, OT Reg. (Ont.)  
Occupational Therapist

June 16, 2025

In this workshop you will learn practical strategies to adapt activities while living with chronic pain. Discover how to conserve and increase your energy, explore tools and devices designed to ease daily tasks, and learn time management techniques to help you stay productive. This session includes guided exercises.

TAPMI OT 05  
WOMEN'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL  
Healthcare. REVOLUTIONIZED

### Navigating Healthcare: Communicate with Confidence

2. Click on "Watch Past Workshops" and scroll through the Workshops

A scenic landscape featuring a turquoise lake in the foreground, with a large, irregularly shaped ice chunk floating in the center. The lake's surface is calm, reflecting the surrounding environment. In the background, there are rugged, snow-capped mountains under a sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greens, and whites, with a slight pinkish hue in the sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, partially obscuring the mountains and sky.

**Questions?**

# References

American College of Sports Medicine. (2014). *ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Baltimore: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

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