

# **SquareONE Rehabilitation**

## **Recovery Strategies Pain Guidebook**

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## The Point of Understanding pain

### “Why are you telling me all this stuff?”

A number of themes will repeat themselves through this book. But one theme that resonates for many is that you can control your pain, manage your own injury and even get out of pain with your own skills and with some guided help from a therapist. Education and knowledge are the first step in problem solving your own pain predicament.

Pain is without a doubt weird. It is never as simple as being some gauge of how damaged your body is. Rather, it is influenced by a number of things in your life...your body being just one of them.

What we've learned through the years is that understanding pain and learning about injuries can help you do the things that help with recovery. Some of those things might be counterintuitive and not make sense unless you fully understand what pain is. For example, many people might think that pain means you need to stop doing everything in your life and if you keep persisting you could harm yourself. There are rare cases where this is true but often rest and avoidance is the opposite of what is needed. When you have pain or injury it might actually be best to get moving again, start exercising or resume your hobbies.

Learning about pain helps change how you think about your problem and can help you start planning out your own personal recovery strategies.

### “learning about pain can help promote healthy behaviours”



# Pain Defined

**“An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage”.**

What does this mean?

The biggest thing you should see is that pain doesn't necessarily mean there is damage. Thus you can have pain with damage, no pain with lots of damage and lots of pain with minimal damage. The definition below is slightly expanded to show that pain is influenced by a lot more than just body tissue. It is affected by and influences other areas of your life. Emotions, sensations, cognitions (beliefs about pain) and social aspects (social withdrawal is common with pain) are involved with persisting pain. **We call this the Bio - Psycho - Social model of pain.** Meaning all areas of your life can influence pain. This is kind of a great thing because it means you have a lot of options to treat your pain.

The Bottom Line: **Pain is not just about Damage**

**Pain is a distressing experience associated with actual or perceived tissue damage with sensory, emotional, cognitive and social components**



## Pain is meant to Motivate an action

**The point of pain is to get you to do something.** Ideally, to protect yourself. Pain is an alarm and alarms are designed to create action. Pain is the same thing.

With many acute injuries the pain alarm is great and helpful. It stops you from walking on a broken leg. But the problem with many alarms is that they keep going off long after they are useful.

The long term pain alarm is not a very good alarm. Meaning it is disconnected from the initial problem. Alarms don't tell us how much smoke there is nor do they tell us if there is even a fire. A smoke alarm can even go off when there is no smoke. Our pain alarm can work the same way. The fire can have been put out but the alarm is still going off.

And when we have pain for a long time we can even increase the sensitivity of the alarm.

### Things to consider:

1. What does an alarm tell us?
2. Does the strength of an alarm tell you how much damage there is?
3. Do alarms often go off without there being damage or fire or even a problem?
4. Can alarm that keeps going off end up being a problem in and of itself?
5. Can you change the sensitivity of an alarm?
6. If you understand why an alarm is going off can you sometimes choose to put less value on it and do other things?





## Learning Pain

### Painful habits and Memories



**Pain is multidimensional** and as it persists it becomes much more about other triggers of sensitivity than about damage or nociception from the tissue.

When pain persists it is almost as if we get “better” at producing pain. We can become more sensitive and activities, movements or environments that we could previously tolerate are now triggers for pain. This is not an unusual thing and we see this in many areas of our lives:

Have you ever experienced a smell that suddenly triggered a memory or an emotion?

Have you walked into a location that you haven't been in a long time and you suddenly remember an event long forgotten.

Do you remember when smoking was outlawed in bars and restaurants? Owners were worried about drink sales because smoking was “coupled” with drinking. They facilitated each other.

Humans are creatures of habit and pain can work in a similar way.

**It is like we “learn” to be better at pain.** Learning and memories work by “linking” them with other things. You know how you can remember the lyrics to a song by singing it with the melody. Well, those lyrics got linked with the melody and it is easier to remember. Same with pain.

**The implications for you are to create new memories and associations.** Meaning if you have associated movement with pain, or fear and worry with a movement or doing certain activities with pain then we want to do something about that association. A large part of treatment is to start exposing yourself to the things that are slightly painful, perhaps you do those things slightly differently and slowly you can habituate and perhaps form new and more positive associations with those movements or activities. Section IV will help you find those contributors and get you started on forming new and pain-free habits.



# Habituation

## Turning pain down



### **The opposite of sensitization is habituation.**

One of the amazing things about people is how we can tolerate and adapt. Habituation means that the same input over time leads to a smaller output.

We can see this very well when you get into a Hot Tub or a hot shower. Initially, it feels incredibly hot and almost unbearable. But over time we adapt and habituate and no longer feel that it is too hot. In fact, you might end up turning up the heat. This is habituation.

In terms of pain the same thing happens. We've discussed nociception being these irritation/danger receptors in the body. You can actually turn down your response to that nociception. When you see someone doing karate and kicking a hard object over and over they will report that they have no pain. What is interesting is that they still have nociception. Those danger/irritation signals are still being sent but we process and modulate them and no longer have pain. This is Habituation.

Habituation and tolerance is one of the Key Messages and Recovery Strategies of this book. It means that we can start doing the things that are important. Even doing some things that hurt a little bit. Because pain does not always mean damage. And doing meaningful activities, building a tolerance to those activities can lead to habituation and less pain.

You might still have those danger signals from your tissues but over time you slowly change your response to those signals. You might still have some pain but over time the meaning of that pain and how that pain affects you can change as well. **You can still live well with some pain.**