



Pain

COMPLEX BIT

Pain is described by the ISAP as

"An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage"

Pain has the function of providing a warning system to protect our bodies from harm. It serves a key purpose to our ongoing survival by protecting us from harmful stimulus and situations. It is in its most basic form a threat detection system.

Pain historically has been seen as a relatively uncomplicated process with an input arising from the tissue and being reproduced in the experience of pain and being an accurate indication of the tissue state. More recently pain has started to be seen as not providing an accurate representation of the state of the tissue or the end of a linear system but instead being modulated by many factors including beliefs and previous experiences, mood & emotion, social & environmental, stress, attention and sensory stimulation.

It is a perception that reflects previous experiences, the present situation and our current biological state.

A modern view of pain is a multifaceted experience that comprises of a sensory/discriminative component providing intensity and location and an affective/behavioural component that influences emotion, attention and actions related to pain or the avoidance of pain.

As pain persists beyond the normal time of healing the neuroanatomical and neurophysiological processes that are used in the experience of pain can change at the periphery, spinal cord and brain levels meaning that the pain we experience can have less to do with the physical state of the tissue and potentially more to do with the threat detection system itself.

Pain

SIMPLE SIDE

Pain is healthy and unavoidable. It is something the overwhelming majority of us will experience at multiple points in our lives and without it we would be in danger of pretty serious damage. Pain is essentially a positive thing providing us with protection, unfortunately it can sometimes become “over” protective and work a bit too well.

Fortunately it can also be altered by understanding more about the process and managing many aspects of our lives that contribute to what we feel and think.

Helping people understand more about their individual experience of pain can be helpful in reducing it.

The simple story

Pain is aptly described as an “alarm system” and sometimes the “alarm” can become too sensitive and is triggered very easily. The “alarm” can be sensitised by many factors including previous injury and pain, our beliefs about our bodies and our current mood and stress levels.

Persistent or chronic pain is often to do with changes within the “alarm system” rather than a faithful reflection of the current physical state of our bodies.

Reading List

Pain

Melzack and Katz Cog sci. 2012

Reconceptualising pain according to modern pain science

Moseley. Physical therapy reviews 2007

Pain and the neuromatrix in the brain

Melzack Journ denta edu 2001

The clinical application of teaching people about pain

Louw Physiother Theory Pract. 2016

