

Chronic pain and physiotherapy

As a physiotherapist I see a wide range of conditions from the acute sprain to intermittent aches and pains. However for some people they suffer from chronic pain due to a variety of conditions. These can be severe low back pain, whiplash, fibromyalgia, phantom limb pain, arthritis, or nerve injuries to name a few.

In my experience, patients suffering from these conditions want a long term holistic plan for their treatment when they attend my clinic. They may have tried a variety of treatments aimed at decreasing pain, but they only mask the pain for short periods. In the mid to long term the pain returns to the same levels as before, making it seem as if nothing will help.

What is needed is a two pronged approach to the pain and activity limitations. A short term goal of pain management with medication, massage, dry needling or other alternative healthcare practices should be the immediate focus. Once the pain has started to decrease, the aim should gradually switch to a long term focus on increasing functioning during daily activities.

This is where exercise therapy works best. Exercise through personalised programs or a clinical Pilate's class can help to increase the strength of specific muscle or allow for a graduated increase in strength aimed at improving functioning in specific tasks. This can be aimed at returning the person pain free to everyday tasks such going to work, getting dressed or going to a spin class without suffering for days after.

However if a strength program is started when pain is high it will feel like the exercises are aggravating the initial injury. This can lead to the exercises being stopped. So it is important to know when to start the exercises but also to know when to start specific ones that won't strain the body too much.

It is important to get the balance between exercise exertion without increasing pain, just as much as it is vital to get the balance between pain relief techniques and exercise prescription. This fine balance between pain reductions with a long term increase in functioning is the most important consideration in chronic pain rehab. Getting the correct balance is different for everyone and requires a tailored plan for your pain.