

## CLINIC LOCATION

This program is offered at the **Michael G. DeGroot Pain Clinic** within the **McMaster University Medical Centre** located at:

1200 Main Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3Z5  
Yellow Section, 4th Floor  
T: 905-521-2100 ext. 44621 F: 905-577-8022  
[www.hhsc.ca/pain](http://www.hhsc.ca/pain)

Please visit the hospital website at  
[www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca](http://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca) for directions and parking.

## WARNING

**You should consult your family doctor prior to beginning an exercise program, especially after a prolonged period of inactivity.**

## REFERRAL INFORMATION

[www.hhsc.ca/pain](http://www.hhsc.ca/pain)

# CHRONIC PAIN AND EXERCISE

# CHRONIC PAIN AND EXERCISE

## Common Myths

**I will injure myself if I exercise.**

**No one should have to exercise when they are in pain.**

**Moving will make my pain worse.**

**Pain equals damage in my body.**

**There is someone out there who can do something to me to fix my pain before I start exercising.**

Research has found that exercise can help with chronic pain symptoms and increase your confidence with moving more freely again.

## The Simple Facts

Exercises can be done in a variety of ways and positions so that you can safely begin to move again without injuring yourself. **Start slowly and build up gradually.**

**Everyone with pain lives with flare-ups.** Learning different strategies to manage your pain flare-ups, including gentle exercises, breathing techniques, and self-talk messages will help you feel confident being active even on a bad day.

**Pain shouldn't stop you from enjoying exercise or your regular activities.** In fact, studies have found that gradually increasing how much you do will make moving easier.

**It is scary to feel pain and we used to believe that pain always meant damage to the body.** More recently, research about our nervous system has increased our understanding of why we have pain and we now know that there is more to pain than physical damage to the body.

**There is no magic pill, surgery, or injection when pain persists.** Some of these things can help, but research shows that a more active approach, such as consistently exercising, will be more beneficial for changing your nervous system.

## Why is exercise important?

When people are living with pain, it can affect your whole life, and can lead to:

- [ Muscle weakness & tightness ]
- [ Decreased endurance ]
- [ Stress ]
- [ Less self-confidence ]
- [ Increased worrying ]
- [ Poor sleep ]
- [ Doing less in general ]
- [ Spend less time with friends ]
- [ Decreased mood ]

All these factors can also cause real, biological changes in your pain alarm system and can make it more sensitive so that you feel pain with less movement. Exercise helps to change the pain alarm system so that it becomes less sensitive.

## How often should I exercise?

Sometimes you need to slow down before you speed up. Your sensitive pain alarm system is more likely to change with doing less exercises but more often. Ideally, doing a few exercises multiple times during the day and linking these exercises with activities you already do in your daily life. For example:

- [ Toe lifts while brushing your teeth ]
- [ Back stretches before you get out of bed to go to the bathroom in the morning ]
- [ Walking for five minutes after a meal ]
- [ A neck stretch whenever you check your email at your computer ]

## Make exercise a way of life.

- [ Find something you enjoy. Be honest – if you do not enjoy it, you will not do it ]
- [ Vary activities to prevent boredom ]
- [ Find a time slot that is convenient for you ]
- [ Walk to the store instead of driving ]
- [ Park further away and walk to your appointment ]

**And most importantly, expect setbacks.** If you become ill and cannot perform your exercise program, do not let it discourage you. Start again as soon as possible. You may need to start back with doing exercises that are a little easier to do and then build up again.