

---

## A GUIDE TO MANAGING PAIN

---

# ENJOYING OUTINGS



### A Pain Concern Leaflet

---

*DOES PAIN PREVENT YOU ENJOYING OUTINGS? SOME PRACTICAL TIPS FROM DIANE PARKES AND ADVICE FROM LIZ MACLEOD*

---

#### BE FAIR TO YOUR PARTNER

---

The majority of chronic pain sufferers are lucky enough to have at least one person they can turn to when things get tough. This could be your husband, wife, partner, mother or father, or even a close friend. These people listen to us and do their utmost to understand what we are going through. They give us much-needed support during medical investigations, hospital visits and treatments. They are there for us when the anger and frustrations spill out. They nurse and support us through flare-ups and difficult times. Therefore we must realise that there must be times when they feel very isolated, even desperate, but they would do anything rather than burden us with their problems and worries. We already have our fair share of these. So who can they turn to? There are carers' associations but some people find private things very difficult to discuss with strangers.

So maybe it is time we gave our carers and loved ones a little of this devotion back. You may well ask 'How can I do that with all my problems?' The simple answer is that it need not take much. Try to involve yourself more in the things they do, even if these things do not really interest you. My husband is a dedicated fisherman and no matter how awful I am feeling I remember to ask him if he caught anything (apparently a vital point among fishermen!), were there many fish about today and what bait was he using. I have absolutely no interest in fishing whatsoever but I am equally positive that when he asks if I managed to write an article or do some ironing that he too is just being "nice".

---

## THINKING OF OTHERS

---

Our lives can become so ruled by our pain and limitations that we forget how to be *normal people* talking about normal everyday events. We can even become guilty of taking our loved ones for granted. One of the aspects where I found I was most guilty was turning down offers to go out (with my husband or anyone else for that matter). I always managed to come up with a good excuse but deep down it was still a form of rejection. So why did I do this? Quite simply because it was easier to stay at home, it was safer here, less painful or stressful. Travelling was uncomfortable for me therefore I avoided it. But are actions like this fair on our partners? Should they be forced to live like hermits just because we choose to?

Would a drive in the country, a day at the coast or even a stroll in the park be such a bad thing? The rides at a theme park may seem "off-limits" but our partners and children would probably love them. We have to learn to adjust and be prepared to make sacrifices for those that we love. And if you make the effort to get out more, who knows you might even come to enjoy it again – as I did!

Include your partner in the preparation and choice of outing. If need be this can be done well in advance so that useful preparations can be discussed and made together. You may have noticed that your pain is worse during a certain time of day. If so, plan an outing for the period of the day when you have least pain. Between you, choose an activity that is mutually appealing, then break it down into its individual components, see if there are short-cuts or if pre-planning will make a difference. Pre-planning involves practising the component parts of an activity, as a series of shorter activities, before attempting the whole activity. You build or pace up your levels of activity beforehand, and get to know your tolerances.

When I first suggested a trip to the cinema my husband was over the moon. It was the first time in years I had actually instigated an outing of any kind. We had our tea at McDonald's, sweets, popcorn, fizzy drinks, and I sat in pain throughout a film I did not even really want to see – STAR WARS! The point is, he really wanted to see it and it made his day that it was my suggestion. I had to spend the following day resting but believe me it was well worth it for the look of sheer pleasure on his face.

---

#### GOING TO THE PICTURES

---

Liz MacLeod is a physiotherapist with a pain management programme, and she has given me some excellent advice. The tip of preparing in advance could be used in respect of the cinema trip in the following ways:

- Choose a short film.
- Find a comfy-seated cinema! Phone and ask. Some cinemas have luxury and first-class seating available.
- Ensure the cinema is on the ground level, or there is access via a lift.
- Telephone the booking to eliminate queuing.
- Book a seat at the back or in the aisle, so you can get up and walk around if need be.
- If you are at the back you will be able to get out quickly once the film is finished. Otherwise wait until the cinema is empty before leaving.
- Get dropped off and picked up at the cinema doors.

As Liz MacLeod says "none of these points individually matter too much, but cumulatively, over a period of time away from the house, may make a big difference to your experience". Another of Liz MacLeod's tips is to try shorter

versions of the activity so that you are more confident. To use the cinema example:

- How long is the drive to the cinema? Is it within your sitting limits, or will you need to break the journey up to stretch or walk around?
- What is your sitting limit/level - could you work on building this up?
- Could you work on increasing your driving tolerance over time?
- Regarding concentration levels for the film - maybe you could hire a video a few times before committing yourself to the cinema. This could help judge your sitting levels when distracted.
- Pacing up levels of activity before taking on a bigger event would mean you would know your tolerance levels beforehand - this helps you feel a bit more in control.

The people who care for us make sacrifices all the time. We must be prepared to reciprocate occasionally. We did not choose to live like this, and they would do anything to change it for us, but this is the way it is. O.K., so they cannot change things in the way they would like but being loved and cared for is a mighty step in dealing with pain. Love can be a powerful drug and so can laughter: we have to try to use both these commodities to our advantage. It is a trite, much-used, old saying but "Look hard enough and you will always find someone worse off than yourself".

## **MAKING THE JOURNEY EASIER**

To help ease the effort involved in outings and holidays, I have included a few hints and tips. They could make travelling that little bit easier.

- Buy a special neck pillow or supportive back rest. There are some excellent ones around. A catalogue called *Back Pack* is available from MEDesign Ltd, FREEPOST, Southport, Merseyside PR8 5BB, tel. 01704 542373.
- Play good music to keep your mind occupied. You could try a "novel" on cassette tape or CD.
- Tension aggravates pain, so be vigilant. Every now and then take a few deeper breaths, and relax. You could try listening to a relaxation tape before you go.
- A rolled-up towel in your lumbar area can alleviate back pain.
- Keep adjusting your seat until you are really comfortable.
- Plan ahead, so you can make frequent stops if need be – **BEFORE** you're sore.
- Aim to start your outing with maximum pain relief. If you are taking medication for pain, ask your pharmacist or doctor when to expect maximum effect – some pain relievers are best taken at least one hour before departure. You might want to use your TENS machine before departure too.
- Pain relievers are best taken at regular intervals - rather than letting the pain build up. Even on short outings there can be unexpected delays, so take your medication or TENS machine with you. (Don't forget spare batteries.)
- Some people find that heat helps their pain. For others, ice is better. You can buy heat packs and cold packs at chemists' shops.
- Always try to have a travel rug or blanket handy, if cold aggravates your pain.
- If you are prone to headaches, always keep a pair of good sunglasses with you (even in winter).
- If you can afford it, a mobile phone is ideal for emergencies.
- If you are travelling for pleasure, focus on your destination. "Good thoughts over bad". ■



***Campaigning on pain***

## **Pain Concern**

**1 Civic Square  
Tranent  
EH33 1LH**

**Office Telephone: 01875 614537**

**Fax: 01875 614505**

**E-mail: [info@painconcern.org.uk](mailto:info@painconcern.org.uk)**

**Website: [www.painconcern.org.uk](http://www.painconcern.org.uk)**

**Helpline: 0844 499 4676**

### ***PUTTING YOU IN CONTROL***

- *Free Factsheet and leaflets to help you manage your pain*
- *Our magazine Pain Matters brings you the best of self help:*
  - *How to cope with pain.*
  - *How well are our pain services working?*
  - *Updates on the latest developments.*
- **Helpline: 0844 499 4676**

*Enjoying Outings* © Diane Parkes and Liz MacLeod. All Rights Reserved. Pain Concern Charity no SC 023559