

PAIN MYTH #1

# "Rest is best for pain."

THE MYTH

*When you are in pain, the safest option is rest. Moving around risks making things worse.*

✓ WHAT SCIENCE SHOWS

For many pain conditions, staying gently active supports your independence and wellbeing far better than resting.

? WHY DOES THIS MATTER?



### Pain does not always mean something is damaged

In many chronic pain conditions, the nervous system becomes more sensitive over time. **Pain during movement does not necessarily mean harm.** Understanding this is an important first step towards feeling more confident about being active.



### Movement supports function and wellbeing

For conditions such as chronic low back pain, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia, regular gentle movement can reduce pain levels and improve physical function. **The goal is to help you do more of what matters in daily life.**



### Prolonged inactivity can make things harder

Extended inactivity can lead to muscle weakening, reduced joint mobility, and increased sensitivity in the nervous system. **Keeping gently active, where possible, helps break that cycle.**



### Fear of movement can itself become a barrier

Research shows that fear of activity is one of the strongest predictors of long-term disability. **Rebuilding confidence in movement is an important part of managing pain well.**



### Start small and build gradually

There is no need to jump straight into strenuous exercise. Beginning with short, manageable activities and slowly increasing over time builds confidence and sets off a positive cycle. **Progress, not perfection** - and never push through severe pain.



## WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

A major review of hundreds of studies - involving tens of thousands of people living with chronic pain - found that exercise and gentle movement consistently helped **reduce pain and improve daily functioning** across conditions including back pain, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia. There was no evidence of harm when activity was introduced gradually and appropriately.

Separate research found that **fear of movement** and catastrophising were among the strongest predictors of long-term disability - highlighting that rebuilding confidence in activity is as important as the physical movement itself.

Geneen et al. (2017). *Physical activity and exercise for chronic pain in adults: an overview of Cochrane Reviews*. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*.

## WHAT EXPERTS SAY



*This fact sheet complements EFIC's On the Move Campaign, which promotes the importance of physical activity for people living with pain.*



### Dr Brona Fullen

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#### Scan to explore the resource

EFIC On the Move Campaign - Physical Activity with Chronic Pain



*No one type of exercise is better than another, and something - anything - is better than nothing. I hope this fact sheet reassures and empowers people living with chronic pain.*



### Dr Keith Smart

Clinical Pain Scientist and Physiotherapist. Assistant Professor, University College Dublin



## THE KEY TAKEAWAY

Pain does not always mean harm. For many - though not all - pain conditions, gentle and gradual movement is one of the most effective things you can do to support your independence and wellbeing. Start small, build slowly, and be patient with yourself. If you are unsure what is right for your situation, speak to your doctor, physiotherapist, or another healthcare professional.