



PLAYFUL MOVEMENT AS A NEW APPROACH TO MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN (CP)

AN OVERVIEW FOR MOVEMENT THERAPISTS, PHYSIOTHERAPISTS, MANUAL THERAPISTS AND PERSONAL TRAINERS

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WHY PLAY?

- We know physical activity is important. It can improve physical and mental health and have positive effects on our quality of life.⁽¹⁾
- While we don't know for sure what exercise is the best, we do know it needs to be enjoyable, as we are more likely to keep doing it.^(2,3)
- Play is great because it helps us learn new ways of moving and can help develop and strengthen connections in our brain.^(4,6)

WHAT IS IT?

- Playful movement is an active biopsychosocial (BPS) approach of movement exploration, involving mindful movement at a low to moderate-intensity.^(7,8)
- The concept comes from several areas: neuroscience, psychology, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, movement therapies, education, and the writings of Todd Hargrove.^(4,6) It is a new area and as further research is carried out, more will be understood about the mechanisms involved.
- The theory is based on the premise that many people with CP have increased pain-related fear, anxiety and movement avoidance,^(11-13,15) altered interoception and body awareness,^(9,13,16,17,22) increased pain perception⁽⁹⁾ and dysfunctional proprioception.⁽²²⁾
- Research has been carried out looking at various forms of movement approaches on a range of chronic pain conditions including low back pain, neck pain, and fibromyalgia.^(7,9,10,16,17,19-21,24,25-27)
- Examples of playful



movement approaches include Feldenkrais,^(4,6,9,24) dance movement therapy,^(10,16,19) yoga,^(21,25,26,27) tai chi and body awareness training.^(17,20)

- Sessions are often in small groups, ranging from one to two sessions per week of 45-90 minutes duration, depending on the movement approach.^(9,10,16,17,19-21)

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Possible benefits

- Promotes movement in daily life.^(4,6)
- Possible analgesic effects and potential non-pharmacological pain management option.^(2,7,10,17,19-21,24-27)
- Promotes movement variability and widens movement repertoire.^(4,6,7,9)
- May improve mood.^(10,19,21,24)
- May improve body awareness and proprioception.^(4,6,8,10,17,20)
- May reduce kinesiophobia and pain-related fear.^(10,19)
- May increase confidence and motivation for movement.^(4,6,10,11,17,23)
- May increase self-efficacy and

ability to manage pain.^(10,17,19)

- May improve physical function.^(4,6,7,9,19-21,25)
- May reduce disability and improve quality of life.^(1,11,19-21,24-27)

Potential risks and management strategies

- Overdoing it, resulting in increased soreness which may increase fear of movement and medication use.^(1,3,7,17,23)
 - Use pacing and graded exposure to manage flare-ups.⁽¹⁻⁴⁾
 - Tailor treatment to the individual and their goals.^(1-3,14)
 - Provide clients with explanations about pain and give reassurance.^(1-3,15)
- Health professionals without adequate knowledge of current pain science or the BPS approach administering the treatment.
 - Therapists should have up to date knowledge of pain science and experience in working with people who have chronic pain.^(1-3,15)



- Therapists should be qualified and appropriately trained health or movement professionals.

appropriate professional national organisations to find suitable practitioners.

ACCESSING IT

- There are no specific therapists providing playful movement therapy in New Zealand but therapists trained in methods such as Feldenkrais, dance movement therapy, gentle yoga (such as restorative or classical yoga) which incorporate different movement options may be suitable.
- No formal referral process is required but it is important to refer to health and movement professionals able to teach movement. Check with the

FINDING MORE INFORMATION

- **5 Rhythms®:** This is a meditative movement approach based on particular rhythms but with no set moves. It is led by trained instructors. You can find out more about this movement approach <https://5rhythms.co.nz/>
- **Dance movement therapy:** This movement therapy is still in its infancy in New Zealand and only a few practitioners are working with people with chronic pain. There is no national body of dance

movement therapists but you can contact Dance Therapy NZ to find out more and locate therapists in your area. <https://www.dancetherapy.co.nz>

- **Feldenkrais:** You can find out more about this movement approach and find Wellington practitioners <https://www.feldenkrais.org.nz>
- **Yoga:** You can find out more about yoga and find teachers in your area (note that not all yoga teachers are members). <https://www.yoga-aotearoa.co.nz>
- **Physiotherapy:** Some physiotherapists use movement therapies in their practice. You can find out which physiotherapists in your area can provide this <https://physio.org.nz>
- **Personal trainers:** REPS is the NZ register of exercise professionals where you can find personal trainers in your area who might integrate playful movement into their approach <http://www.reps.org.nz>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These are good resources online that can help explain more about these approaches.

The Relation of Pain and Feldenkrais - Feldenkrais Awareness Summit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqb9ZrHxza0>

The Healing Podcast with Dr Joe Tatta - Movement therapy and pain science with Todd Hargrove:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16QoDWXbA4k>

Playful Somatic Movements:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Spl3HQI0gM>

Dance Movement Therapy - Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3o2ii5rEal>

Lucia Horan dances the 5

Rhythms: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1mK7DrBnSU>





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