

Playful Movement

A new approach to manage chronic pain



Play is.....

“Engaging in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose” - Oxford Dictionary



Why play?

We know physical activity is important. It can improve our physical and mental health and have positive effects on our quality of life⁽¹⁾.

You have probably been told by your doctor or physiotherapist that keeping active is important, and you might have been given specific exercises to do.

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).



Odette Wood, Oct 2019

What is playful movement?

While standard exercises might focus on the number of repetitions and doing the exercise in the correct way, playful movement is about exploring different movements with curiosity^(4,6).

How the movement “feels” to you is important, rather than how hard you are working^(17, 20).

It is mindful movement, which is movement focused on feeling what your body is doing in the present moment. It will often also have a focus on breath⁽⁷⁾.

It is generally low to moderate intensity⁽⁸⁾.



How does it work?

- It is a new area, so the research on it is still growing.
- What we know, from the many areas of science that study chronic pain, is that people with chronic pain have some changes in their brain and nervous system. These changes can affect how people with chronic pain feel pain, how they move, and how aware they are of their body^(9,11-13,15-17,22).
- Playful movement might help change these and have positive effects on chronic pain. Some particular conditions it may help include low back pain, neck pain and fibromyalgia^(7,9,10,16-17,19-21,24-27).
- Studies on different types of playful movement which have had positive effects on people with chronic pain include dance movement therapy, Feldenkrais, some types of yoga, tai chi and body awareness training^(4,6,9-10,16-17,19-21,24-27).



What are the benefits?

Playful movement may have a number of benefits that might help you:

- It is a fun way to be physically active and improve your physical functioning^(4,6-7,9,19-21,25)
- It may reduce your pain ^(7,10,17,19-21,24-27)
- It may be a useful drug-free method to help manage your chronic pain, either combined with other treatments, or on its own^(2,7,10,17,19-21,24-27)
- It can help you get more movement variety, and variety is good!^(4,6-7,9)
- It may improve your mood^(10,19,21,24)
- It may improve your awareness of your body and how it is moving^(4,6,8,10,17,20)
- It may help you feel more confident and less fearful of movement^(4,6,10-11,17,19,23)
- It may increase your belief in your ability to manage your pain^(10,7,19)
- It may help you develop problem-solving skills that can be used in every day activities^(4,6)
- It may decrease disability and improve your quality of life^(1,11,19-21,24-27)

What are the risks?

Generally this form of physical activity has few risks but there are some things to be aware of.

- **Choosing the right person to work with:** A health or movement professional (for example, a dance movement therapist, yoga teacher, Feldenkrais instructor or personal trainer) who is knowledgeable and experienced in working with people with chronic pain will be able to work safely with you and give you good information and support. When we understand more about our pain and our nervous system, it can help us feel safer when moving^(2,3,15).
- **Individualised sessions:** Talk about your goals and current physical activity levels with your health professional so they can tailor sessions to your needs. This will help keep you motivated^(1-3,14).
- **Start low, go slow:** If we overdo it we might feel sore afterwards, so pacing your activity and gradually building up is important. This means doing shorter sessions, giving yourself enough recovery between sessions to give your body time to get used to the activity and manage any flare-ups⁽¹⁻⁴⁾.

What is involved?

Playful movement can be done in a variety of ways. It is important to find the type of movement that you will enjoy doing, as you will be more likely to keep doing it ⁽²⁾.

It may include relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, gentle stretching and movement warmup, and movements that might be similar to movements that you do in daily life, such bending, rising, kneeling, reaching, turning, moving from one position to another.

There are different movement therapies you can explore, some examples are:

- Dance movement therapy, 5 rhythms dance
- Feldenkrais
- Gentle yoga styles (classical, restorative)
- Tai chi
- Gentle water-based forms of movement such as low intensity aqua-therapy may be an alternative

Sessions are often in small groups, for 45-90 minutes depending on the style of movement. One to two sessions a week seems to be most ideal ^(6,9,10,16,17,19-21).

How and where can I access it?

Who is it suitable for?

Because playful movement is not high intensity and does not need any previous experience, it can be suitable for children, teens and adults with chronic pain, but check with your GP or main health professional first.

Finding practitioners

Because it is a very new approach, there are no “playful movement” therapists, but you can look at the variety of movement styles mentioned earlier to find the one right for you.

Ask your GP or other health professional to recommend a suitable practitioner.

Check the websites on the next page to find out about registered and trained practitioners in your area.

Cost

Sessions in Wellington range from \$15-\$20 per casual session, and from \$90-\$160 for a block of sessions (6-10), depending on movement style you choose. Some may charge lower rates for unwaged people.

In most cases these will not be funded through ACC, but if you are part of a pain management clinic, you can ask your health professional to see if rates are lowered.

Where can I find 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 and classes in Wellington <https://www.5rhythmswellington.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 Wellington <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 Wellington (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 Wellington can provide this <https://physio.org.nz/>

Personal trainers: REPS is the NZ register of exercise professionals where you can find personal trainers in Wellington <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=vqb9ZrHzxa0>

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

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

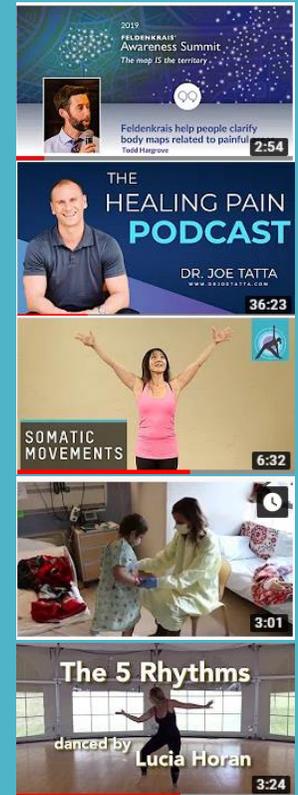
Playful Somatic Movements

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Spl3HQlOgM>

Dance Movement Therapy - Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3o2ii5rEaI>

Lucia Horan dances the 5 Rhythms <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1mK7DrBnSU>



Finally.....

“Play is our brain’s favourite way of learning” – Diane Ackerman

“Play is training for the unexpected” – Marc Bekoff, Marek Spinka, Ruth Newberry

“ Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do. Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do” – Mark Twain



References

1. Daenen L, Varkey E, Kellmann M, Nijs J. Exercise, not to exercise, or how to exercise in patients with chronic pain? Applying science to practice. *Clin J Pain*. 2015 Feb 21;31(2):108–14.
2. Ambrose KR, Golightly YM. Physical exercise as non-pharmacological treatment of chronic pain: Why and when. Vol. 29, *Best Practice and Research: Clinical Rheumatology*. Bailliere Tindall Ltd; 2015. p. 120–30.
3. Booth J, Moseley GL, Schiltenswolf M, Cashin A, Davies M, Hübscher M. Exercise for chronic musculoskeletal pain: A biopsychosocial approach. *Musculoskeletal Care*. 2017;15(4):413–21.
4. Hargrove TR. *A guide to better movement: the science and practice of moving with more skill and less pain*. Seattle: Better Movement Publishing; 2014. 1–295 p.
5. Graham KL, Burghardt GM. Current perspectives on the biological study of play: Signs of progress. *Q Rev Biol*. 2010 Dec;85(4):393–418.
6. Hargrove TR. *Playing with movement: How to explore the many dimensions of physical health and performance*. Seattle: Better Movement Publishing; 2019. 1–243 p.
7. Omar MTA, Hegazy FA, Mokashi SP. Influences of purposeful activity versus rote exercise on improving pain and hand function in pediatric burn. *Burns*. 2012 Mar 1;38(2):261–8.
8. La Forge R. Mind-Body (Mindful) Exercise in Practice. *ACSM's Heal Fit J*. 2016 Jul 1;20(4):6–8.
9. Paolucci T, Zangrando F, Iosa M, De Angelis S, Marzoli C, Piccinini G, et al. Improved interoceptive awareness in chronic low back pain: a comparison of Back school versus Feldenkrais method. *Disabil Rehabil*. 2017 May 8;39(10):994–1001.
10. Shim M, Johnson RB, Gasson S, Goodill S, Jermyn R, Bradt J. A model of dance/movement therapy for resilience-building in people living with chronic pain. *Eur J Integr Med*. 2017 Jan 1;9:27–40.
11. Vlaeyen JWS, Linton SJ. Fear-avoidance model of chronic musculoskeletal pain: 12 years on. *Pain*. 2012 Jun;153(6):1144–7.
12. Vlaeyen JWS, Linton SJ. Fear-avoidance and its consequences in chronic musculoskeletal pain: A state of the art. *Pain*. 2000;85(3):317–32.
13. De Peuter S, Van Diest I, Vansteenwegen D, Van den Bergh O, Vlaeyen JWS. Understanding fear of pain in chronic pain: Interoceptive fear conditioning as a novel approach. *Eur J Pain*. 2011 Oct 1;15(9):889–94.
14. Boudreau SA, Farina D, Falla D. The role of motor learning and neuroplasticity in designing rehabilitation approaches for musculoskeletal pain disorders. *Man Ther*. 2010 Oct;15(5):410–4.
15. Zusman M. Associative memory for movement-evoked chronic back pain and its extinction with musculoskeletal physiotherapy. *Phys Ther Rev*. 2008 Feb 1;13(1):57–68.
16. Nordström K, Ekhammar A, Larsson ME. Physiotherapist-guided Free Movement Dance for patients with persistent pain is empowering in everyday living. A qualitative study. *European Journal of Physiotherapy*. 2018 Dec 31;1–12.
17. Lundwall A, Ryman A, Bjarnegård Sellius A, Mannerkorpi K. Pain requires processing – How the experience of pain is influenced by Basic Body Awareness Therapy in patients with long-term pain. *J Bodyw Mov Ther*. 2019 Feb 5.
18. Clark D, Schumann F, Mostofsky SH. Mindful movement and skilled attention. *Front Hum Neurosci*. 2015 Jun 29;9(June).
19. Murillo-García Á, Villafaina S, Adsuar JC, Gusi N, Collado-Mateo D. Effects of dance on pain in patients with fibromyalgia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. Hindawi; 2018. p. 1–16.
20. Seferiadis A, Ohlin P, Billhult A, Gunnarsson R. Basic body awareness therapy or exercise therapy for the treatment of chronic whiplash associated disorders: A randomized comparative clinical trial. *Disabil Rehabil*. 2016 Feb 27;38(5):442–51.
21. Langhorst J, Klose P, Dobos GJ, Bernardy K, Häuser W. Efficacy and safety of meditative movement therapies in fibromyalgia syndrome: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Rheumatology International*. 2013;33:193–207.
22. Tsay A, Allen TJ, Proske U, Giummarra MJ. Sensing the body in chronic pain: A review of psychophysical studies implicating altered body representation. *Neurosci Biobehav Rev*. 2015 May 1;52:221–32.
23. Nijs J, Lluch Girbés E, Lundberg M, Mallfiet A, Sterling M. Exercise therapy for chronic musculoskeletal pain: Innovation by altering pain memories. *Man Ther*. 2015;20(1):216–20.
24. Mohan V, Paungmali A, Sitalertpisan P, Henry LJ, Mohamad NB, Kharami NNB. Feldenkrais method on neck and low back pain to the type of exercises and outcome measurement tools: A systematic review. Vol. 24, *Polish Annals of Medicine*. 2017;24:77–83.
25. Ward L, Stebbings S, Cherkin D, Baxter GD. Yoga for Functional Ability, Pain and Psychosocial Outcomes in Musculoskeletal Conditions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Musculoskeletal Care*. 2013 Dec;11(4):203–17.
26. Cramer H, Lauche R, Haller H, Dobos G. A systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga for low back pain. Vol. 29, *Clinical Journal of Pain*. 2013;450–60.
27. Chang D, Sklar M, Holt JA, Groessl EJ. Yoga as a treatment for chronic low back pain: A systematic review of the literature. *J Orthop Rheumatol*. 2016;3(1):1–8.