The persistent pain cycle

How pain, fear and doing less feed each other.



How each step feeds the next

- **Beliefs about damage** make ordinary movement feel dangerous.
- **Fear and tension** tighten muscles and turn the pain system up.
- **Resting and guarding** help with a new injury. Over months they lead to weakness and stiffness, so less activity causes more pain.
- **Life shrinks.** Fewer good things, more time to notice pain, lower mood.

Breaking the cycle

Where	What helps
Beliefs	Learning that hurt does not always mean harm. Asking your doctor or physio what is safe.
Fear and tension	Relaxation, breathing, addressing worries, graded return to feared movements.
Activity	Finding a steady baseline and building up slowly. Pacing.
Life	Getting back to valued activities and people, in adapted ways if needed.

Where am I in this cycle at the moment?

The link I could most easily work on

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Thoughts about pain

What you tell yourself about pain changes how much it hurts and how much you do.

Name _____ Date _____

Pain grabs attention and sets off alarming thoughts. Those thoughts raise fear and tension, which turn pain up. A calmer, more accurate thought does not remove pain. It stops fear being added to it.

Alarming thought	A steadier version
"This pain means I am doing damage."	"Hurt does not always mean harm. I have been told this movement is safe."
"I cannot stand this."	"It is very unpleasant, and I have got through it before. It will ease."
"It will only get worse."	"It goes up and down. I am learning what helps."
"I cannot do anything any more."	"There are things I do differently now, and things I can build back."
"I should push through."	"A steady amount works better than forcing it."

Situation	What I told myself	Fear or distress (0 to 10)	A steadier thought	Distress now

The thought about pain that affects me most

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