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

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.