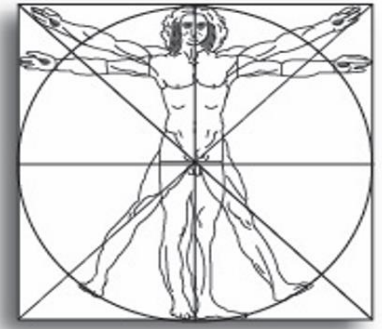


# SOUTHPORT PHYSIOTHERAPY CENTRE



3E/34 High Street, Southport QLD 4215 P: (07) 5591 4333 E: southportphysio@gmail.com

## What is pain and why do I feel it?

Many of us are not very good at dealing with pain – from needles to knee scrapes, it doesn't take much to make us wince. Our self-preservation reflexes snap into action, and we jerk ourselves away from the nasty object before we even realise what has happened.

Our bodies are pre-disposed to save us from potential injury by taking even the smallest enemy seriously. So, really, pain is a good thing – if you didn't feel it as you spilled your hot coffee on your hand, you'd be oblivious to the burn inching across your knuckles. So, what is pain – and what happens when we feel it?



### What is pain?

Pain developed as an evolutionary protective mechanism to help us avoid harm. We have specialised pain receptors known as nociceptors that are activated when we're injured. They send a signal through the nerves to the spinal cord and up into the brain.

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## How do we feel pain?

Before the message is delivered to the brain, nerves in our spinal cord react as a reflex, ordering our muscles to instinctively pull away to avoid further damage.

Once the brain realises something is amiss, it springs into action and sends a pulse back to the part of the body affected so we know which area we need to pay attention to.



## Is it all in your head?

Our brain may be an expert at identifying which toe we've stubbed, but it has no pain receptors itself. In fact, surgeons can perform surgery inside the skull without general anaesthetic while the patient is awake. In 2018, a South African man even played guitar during an operation to remove a brain tumour.

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## **Types and causes of pain.**

From dull aches and muscle soreness to sharp, stabbing sensations and agonising burns, there are a myriad of ways to experience pain.

One way to categorise pain is by the damage caused.

## **What are the common types of pain?**

### 1. Neuropathic pain

Tissue damage is neuropathic pain. This includes burning, electric shocks, tingling, pins and needles, numbness and itching.

### 2. Psychogenic pain

Psychogenic pain usually starts off as neuropathic but then other factors such as stress, fear or mood can cause it to be prolonged.

### 3. Acute pain

Acute pain is sudden onset, usually as a result of tissue damage and lasts less than three months.

### 4. Chronic pain

Chronic pain lasts longer than 3 months and can persist after the injury has healed if the pain receptors continue sending signals to the brain.

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*How do we know if pain is serious enough to warrant a trip to the GP or physio?*

If the pain is different to anything you've felt before, if it's stopping you from doing things or if it lasts more than a few days, you should see a doctor.

So next time you scald yourself with hot coffee, think about the miraculous way messages zip around your body to contain the emergency and then how quickly the damaged cells begin to repair. And if you use some fruity language when you cut your finger slicing carrots, good news – science has shown swearing can reduce pain, with the benefits most noticeable if you don't usually swear regularly.

In the past 50 years we have made great advances in understanding pain and its processes. However, in some ways this has just highlighted how much we still don't know about the complexity of pain and how to control it.

*Please note:* The tips throughout this article serve as broad information and should not replace any advice you have been given by your medical practitioner.