

# Module 2: Understanding Pain (and Why It's Not Always What You Think)

## Introduction - Important Please Read First

This module is here to help you better understand mild discomfort, everyday tension, or general body signals, not to diagnose or treat specific injuries or illness. It is meant to empower you to interpret and respond to your body's messages with calm and clarity, not fear.

If you're experiencing:

- New, sharp, or increasing pain
- Symptoms that limit your movement, sleep, or daily life
- Numbness, weakness, or persistent fatigue
- Or anything that feels unusual or concerning to you

Please don't push through or guess. It's always better to check in early with your GP, physiotherapist, or other qualified health professional.

This module is about developing self-awareness not pushing through discomfort, overriding your instincts, or replacing medical treatment. It's designed to support the work you may already be doing with your massage therapist, physiotherapist, or GP.

## Why Pain Doesn't Always Mean Damage

Pain is a normal, human experience. It's part of your body's built in warning system but like any alarm, it can sometimes go off for reasons that don't mean danger.

Think of it like a smoke detector. Sometimes it goes off because there's a real fire. But sometimes, it's just burnt toast. The body's warning system works the same way. It can be triggered by change, stress, overload, or unfamiliar movement.

You might feel discomfort after:

- A return to exercise or increased activity
- Standing or sitting too long
- Emotional stress or mental exhaustion
- A poor night's sleep or changes in routine

These aren't signs of harm, they're signs that your body is responding to load, effort, or imbalance. And that's okay.

Some discomfort is simply a signal for change, not a sign of damage. With care and attention, your body often adapts, recovers, and finds a new rhythm.

Learning to recognise these moments helps you stay confident, instead of anxious about every ache or twinge.

## **Pain, Discomfort, and the Nervous System**

Pain isn't always about tissue damage. Sometimes it's your nervous system being extra alert, especially when things feel unfamiliar, stressful, or overwhelming.

For example:

- If you've had an injury before, you might feel more aware or cautious in that area even if it's healed.
- If your body is tired, stressed, or depleted, it might send stronger signals to get your attention.

What you're feeling is part of your body's natural feedback system. And that's something you can work with, not fear.

## **What You Can Do**

- Check in with yourself. Was today more active or stressful than usual? Did you hold a posture for too long?
- Give your body a chance to respond, sometimes that means rest, sometimes gentle movement.
- Notice what helps: Does a heat pack ease the tension? Does walking make you feel better after stiffness?

You're not aiming for *no signals ever*. You're learning what's normal, what's changeable, and what's worth following up.

And remember: **you don't have to figure it out alone**. If something feels persistent, unfamiliar, or unsettling, checking in with a trusted practitioner is always a smart choice.

## **The Traffic Light Model**

This simple, visual model helps you tune in to physical sensations with more clarity and helps you decide what to do next, without guessing.

### Green Light Sensations

These are safe, healthy responses to activity or change. They might feel like:

- Gentle stretching
- Tiredness after movement
- Light muscle soreness
- Warmth, energy, or looseness

Green lights are your body's way of saying, "This feels good. I'm working, adapting, and rebuilding."

They often follow healthy activity and are part of your body strengthening or settling. Feeling pleasantly tired or noticing a soft ache the day after a good walk or workout is a great example.

What to do: Enjoy the sensation. Drink water, move gently, and let the recovery do its job.

### ● Yellow Light Sensations

These are signals to check in, not shut down. They might feel like:

- Mild stiffness in the morning
- Achy muscles after a big day
- Tension that eases with breath, warmth, or movement
- Areas that feel "off" but not painful

Yellow lights are your body asking for a little adjustment. Maybe you've been sitting too long, carrying something awkward, or are feeling stressed.

They're often short lived and manageable. The key is noticing them early.

What to do: Adjust your posture, swap positions, take breaks, or add gentle movement. A heat pack, breathwork, or mindful walk may help ease them.

These are usually your body's early whispers. Listening now can help prevent louder signals later.

### ● Red Light Sensations

These are signs to slow down and possibly reach out. They might feel like:

- Sharp, stabbing, or shooting pain
- Sensations that get worse over time
- Discomfort that spreads or doesn't ease after a day or two
- Pain that interrupts your sleep, limits your movement, or causes worry

Red lights may signal an underlying issue that needs professional assessment. While they don't always mean serious injury, they are your body's way of clearly asking for help.

What to do: Stop and reassess. Avoid pushing through or self treating long term. Seek professional guidance. A short consult may give you peace of mind and prevent further stress.

You don't have to figure it all out on your own. You also don't have to wait until things are unbearable to deserve care.

## What This Means for You

Understanding the Traffic Light Model puts you back in the driver's seat. Instead of fearing every body signal or ignoring discomfort until it becomes unbearable, you can start making choices from a place of awareness and trust.

This shift helps you:

**Respond instead of react.** When you understand your body's cues, you no longer feel at the mercy of sudden pain or tension. You can make small, supportive changes early, a stretch here, a breath there, a moment of rest, before things escalate.

**Know when to move, when to rest, and when to seek support.** It's not about forcing or avoiding, it's about listening and choosing wisely. It's about being honest with what your body needs today and knowing that reaching out for help is a sign of care, not failure.

**Recognise patterns over time.** You might start noticing things like: "My neck always tightens after long workdays," or "I actually feel better after a walk, even if I start stiff." These patterns help you make smarter, more sustainable choices.

**Feel more in control of your self-care.** A lot of people feel stuck between doing nothing or doing too much. This model offers a middle ground, small, manageable actions that feel good and make a difference.

"Let's say you've just come home from gardening and your lower back feels sore. You might think, 'Did I hurt it again?' But when you pause and reflect, you realise the discomfort is even, dull, and familiar. You take a breath, stretch gently, and use the Traffic Light Model to decide: green. Keep moving, just more mindfully."

## Not All Signals Mean the Same Thing

It's important to remember:

**Not all pain means stop.** Mild post exercise soreness or the stretch of a long held posture can be perfectly normal, even helpful. But if discomfort is sharp, increasing, or changing how you move, that's your cue to ease off and consider getting professional support.

**Not all comfort means go.** Just because something feels fine doesn't mean it's right for your body long term. Sitting might feel good for an hour, but if it leaves you stiff or sluggish, your body may be asking for something different.

Learning to interpret signals in context is key. That's what this model is here to help you do, without fear or guesswork.

### **This Is About Today's Body**

Your body is different every day. Influenced by stress, sleep, movement, emotions, hydration, and more. What felt good yesterday might be too much today. What was uncomfortable last week might now feel fine.

That's why checking in regularly is so powerful. You're not committing to the same routine, you're simply asking: *"What do I need today?"*

### **Presence Builds Resilience**

You don't need to get everything right, just stay open and curious. It's about presence, noticing without judgment and responding with kindness.

And presence builds resilience.

When you practise tuning in calmly, your nervous system starts to feel safer. It learns that pain or tension doesn't always mean harm and you get better at adjusting with confidence and care.

## **Tool 3: The Traffic Light Body Scan**

This is a simple practice you can do anywhere. It helps you track what your body's saying, without overthinking or self-diagnosing.

Time: 1–2 minutes

Do it: Sitting, standing, or lying down

Step-by-Step:

1. Take a slow breath and bring your attention inward.
2. Scan your body slowly from head to toe, no rush.
3. Ask yourself:
  1. ● What feels like a green light? (Strong, stretchy, lightly tired)
  2. ● Where are my yellow lights? (Tight, tense, stiff)
  3. ● Are there any red lights? (Sharp, worrying, or new)

Just notice. You're building trust, not control.

The more often you check in this way, the faster you'll learn what's normal, what needs support, and what makes you feel better.

## Optional Practice: "The Gentle Pivot"

If you spot a yellow-light signal, try asking:

- “What might help this shift? Movement, rest, warmth?”
- “Can I change position or pace?”
- “Would a stretch or short walk feel supportive?”

The aim isn't to shut down all sensation, it's to recognise what helps. It's offering your body gentle, helpful input and giving it space to recalibrate.

Try this in everyday moments: after long sitting, when you feel emotionally drained, or when tension creeps in. You might be surprised how small shifts create big relief.

## What's Next

By now, you've started shifting how you think about pain. You've learned that not all pain is a problem, and that your body's signals, whether they feel good, odd, or uncomfortable, can be understood, not feared.

You've explored:

- How the **Traffic Light Model** helps you check in calmly
- Why pain doesn't always mean damage
- When to pause, when to move, and when to reach out for help
- How to notice patterns before they become problems

The more you practise tuning in, the more confident and in control you'll feel, not because you'll always know exactly what's going on, but because you'll know how to *listen and respond* with care.

Coming Up in Module 3: Nervous System 101 – Why You're Not Just “Being Sensitive”

In **Module 3**, we'll look at *why* some people feel more pain, tension, or flare-ups than others, even when there's no obvious injury.

You'll learn:

- How your nervous system works behind the scenes to keep you safe
- Why stress, emotions, and even past experiences can amplify pain
- That you're not imagining it, your sensitivity has a real reason
- Gentle ways to calm your system and feel more steady in your body

This next step helps explain some of the “why” behind the patterns you've been noticing. It's where self-care meets self understanding and it's a game changer for anyone who's ever been told to “just relax” or “toughen up.”

