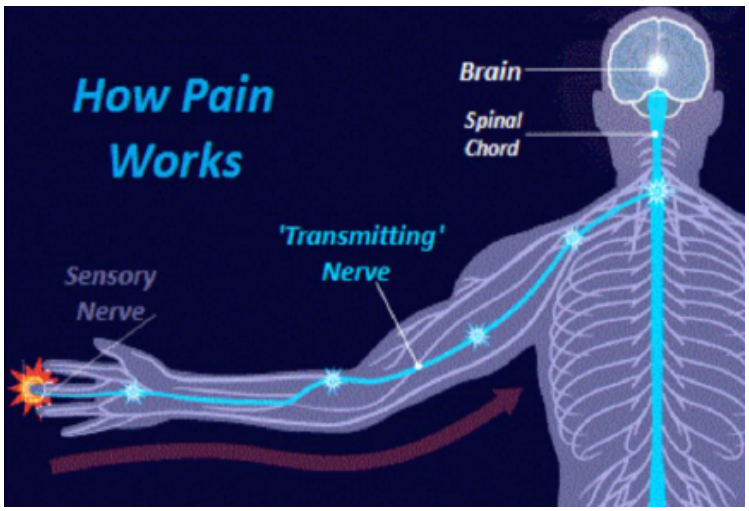
ACUTE PAIN

WHAT IS PAIN?

This may seem like an easy question as it is experienced regularly by everyone, but the world's understanding of pain is always developing and it is a lot more complex than previously thought. The below information is aimed at informing you about what we call "Acute pain"; which is important knowledge in helping with your recovery. Pain is generally identified as an individual's unpleasant sensation or 'experience' that is caused by an actual or perceived injury to body tissues and produces physical and emotional reactions. It is our body's way of protecting us from harm by causing us to avoid certain actions or perform others. Your body's nervous system is complex and full of nerves which carry messages (stimuli) to the brain where it will decipher the incoming messages and choose how to appropriately respond. For example, when your brain picks up the sensation that your finger is being pricked by a pin it will want to protect your finger from further damage and thus cause pain which will prompt you to move away from the pin.

Acute pain is generally classified as pain with a sudden onset, usually the result of a clearly defined cause and lasting no more than 6 months. The cause is commonly injured body tissues. The injured tissues cause nerves to transmit signals to the brain where pain will then be created, initiating a protective reaction. The painful sensations are usually produced so that you take evasive action and stop irritating the injured body part and allow it to heal. For instance, the pain after rolling your ankle promotes you to stop using your foot to allow the injured ankle to heal.



Under normal conditions the stimuli travelling up your nerve and into your brain from your injured body part will diminish as the healing progresses. This usually takes 4-6 weeks but can continue for a few months. Therefore, once the healing is complete these stimuli should cease and thus so should the pain.
However, it is important to note that for some people there are changes within their nervous system which cause the brain to continue to produce pain for months to years afterwards, despite no tissue damage; this is called chronic pain.

For more information about chronic pain please ask your physiotherapist.