How does stress affect pain?

Stress and worry affect pain in many ways. Injured muscles, tendons and joints heal, but if pain doesn’t go away, stress and worry may be a cause.

All pain depends on the brain. Pain starts in the injured area, and a message is sent through the nerves to the brain. If the brain has a lot of tasks to do, it can ignore pain messages. If it is worried, depressed, or stressed, it may pay too much attention to pain messages. This can result in more feelings of pain.

The brain also controls how muscles work together. If one part of the body is injured, other parts of the body do more work. After the injury heals, the workload should shift back to normal. Stress may prevent that shift, and the overworked parts may start hurting.

Another way stress affects pain is to make muscles tighten up. If muscles stay tight for a long time, they start to hurt.

What can I do about the pain I am having?

If back pain does not get better, and there are no signs of nerve injuries or other serious conditions, there are ways to help your brain control your pain.

1. Physical therapy can bring back normal muscle movements.
2. Relaxation and biofeedback can relax tight muscles.
3. An antidepressant can help the pain message come through at a normal level instead of extra strong.
4. A device called TENS unit can block excessive pain sensations where they start.
5. If your pain is very bad, you may be referred to a pain specialist to try these methods.

You can learn to control your pain instead of having your pain control you.