

My Stress–Pain Pattern Worksheet

An IC Ally Resource

Gently exploring how stress, emotions and daily life might connect with the pain you feel.

Many people living with chronic pain or Interstitial Cystitis notice connections between their stress levels and their symptoms. Recognising these patterns can help you respond earlier and more kindly to what your body needs. This worksheet is an invitation to observe with curiosity and compassion, not to blame yourself. Your symptoms are real, and understanding the links between your nervous system and your pain is a tool for gentle, informed self-care.

How to Use This Workbook

01

Print and Settle In

Find a quiet, comfortable space where you can write freely. This workbook is designed for you to fill in by hand at your own pace.

02

Be Gentle with Yourself

There are no right or wrong answers here. This is about noticing patterns, not achieving perfection. Missing days or skipping sections is completely fine.

03

Observe with Curiosity

Think of yourself as a friendly detective, gathering clues about how your body and mind communicate. Small insights count.

04

Return When Ready

You can complete this workbook all at once or return to sections over time. Let it work at your rhythm.

- ☐ **Remember:** Understanding the stress–pain connection doesn't mean your pain is "all in your head." It means your nervous system and body are deeply connected, and recognising these links can empower you to respond with greater care.

Understanding Stress and Pain

The Mind-Body Connection

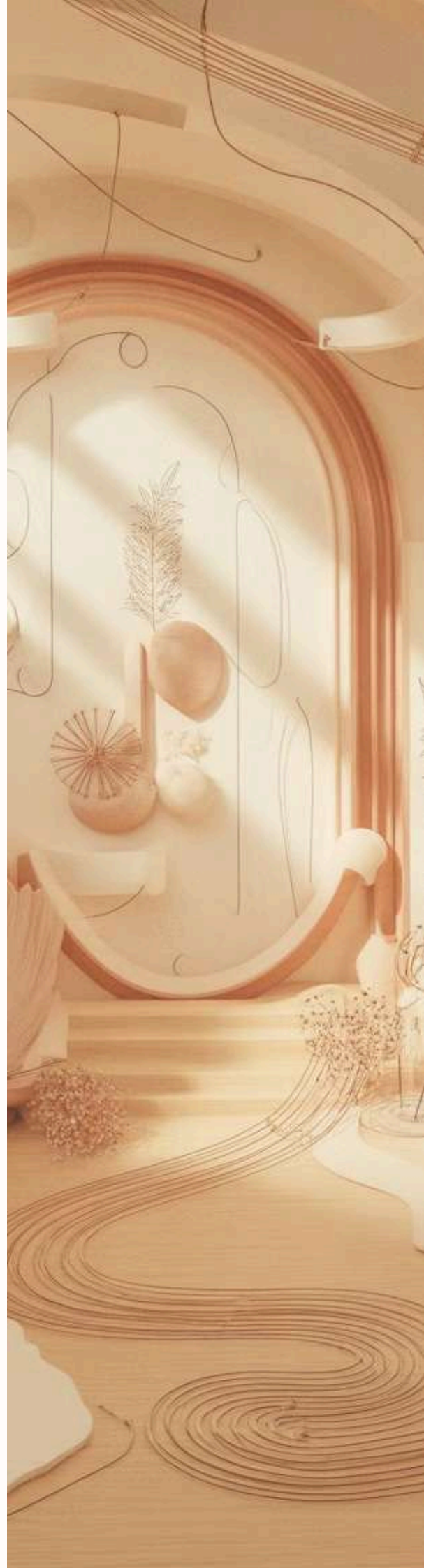
Your nervous system is constantly processing information from your environment, your thoughts, and your body. When stress builds—whether from work pressure, relationship difficulties, health worries, or sensory overload—your nervous system can become sensitised.

This heightened state can amplify pain signals, tighten muscles, and trigger bladder symptoms. This doesn't make your pain less real. Rather, it helps explain why pain can fluctuate with life circumstances.

Why Patterns Matter

When you begin to notice what precedes pain flares—certain situations, thoughts, or activities—you gain valuable information. These patterns become signposts, helping you recognise when your body might need extra support, rest, or gentle intervention.

"My body is giving me information, not punishing me. When I learn its language, I can respond with kindness."



Identifying Your Stress Triggers

Stress triggers are different for everyone. They might include work deadlines, family dynamics, financial worries, health anxiety, sensory overwhelm, or even positive events that require energy. There's no judgement here—just observation.

Recognising what activates your stress response is the first step towards creating a personalised support plan. Take your time filling in the table below. You can return to it over several days or weeks as you notice new patterns.



Recording My Stress Triggers

Use this table to track situations that activate stress in your body and mind. Be as specific as you can—details help reveal patterns.

| Trigger Situation What is happening? | Intensity (1–10) How stressful? | Frequency How often? | Context Where, when, with whom? |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Example: Difficult conversation with partner | 8 | Weekly | Evening, at home, when tired |
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Reflection Space

Looking at this list, I notice these themes or patterns in my stress triggers:



Mapping Your Physical Pain Points

Stress and emotions often manifest as physical sensations in different parts of the body. Some people feel tension in their jaw or shoulders, whilst others notice digestive changes, pelvic discomfort, or headaches.

This doesn't mean your pain is imaginary or "just stress." It means your nervous system and body are intricately connected, and understanding where stress shows up physically can help you respond with targeted comfort and care.

- ❏ **Gentle Reminder:** Not everyone experiences pain in the same areas. Your body's signals are unique to you. There's no "correct" way to feel stress or pain.



Body Area Check-In: Head and Neck

Head and Neck

Common stress responses: headaches, jaw clenching, teeth grinding, neck stiffness, temple tension, difficulty turning head

Notes: What I notice here when I'm stressed

Shoulders and Upper Back

Common stress responses: muscle tension, knots between shoulder blades, restricted movement, carrying shoulders high and tight, upper back pain

Notes: What I notice here when I'm stressed

Body Area Check-In: Chest and Core

Chest and Stomach

Common stress responses: chest tightness, racing heart, shallow breathing, digestive discomfort, nausea, butterflies, stomach pain

Notes: What I notice here when I'm stressed

Lower Back, Hips, Pelvis and Legs

Common stress responses: lower back pain, pelvic floor tension, bladder urgency or pain, hip tightness, leg heaviness, restlessness, difficulty sitting

Notes: What I notice here when I'm stressed

Connecting Stress to Pain

Now that you've mapped where stress shows up in your body, let's explore the timing and patterns. These connections can be subtle, so be patient with yourself as you reflect.

Looking Back

When I look back, I notice pain often shows up after:

(e.g. arguments, long work days, poor sleep, rushing, social events)

During Stressful Periods

During particularly stressful periods, the pain in my body tends to:

(e.g. intensify, spread, feel sharper, last longer)

Early Warning Signs

Early warning signs my body gives me are:

(e.g. tiredness, irritability, muscle tension, changes in sleep or appetite)



Tracking Patterns Over Time

A little bit of regular tracking can reveal patterns you might otherwise miss. This isn't about perfection—missing days is absolutely fine. Even tracking for just a few days can offer valuable insights.

Use the weekly tracker on the next page to record your stress levels, pain locations and intensity, and any notable triggers or events. You might notice that certain days of the week are harder, or that particular activities affect your symptoms in predictable ways.

- ☐ **Tip:** Keep this workbook somewhere accessible—by your bed, on your desk, or in your bag. The easier it is to reach, the more likely you are to use it regularly.

Weekly Stress-Pain Tracker

Track your patterns for one week. Rate stress and pain from 1 (minimal) to 10 (severe).

| Date | Stress Level (1-10) | Main Pain Location(s) | Pain Intensity (1-10) | Notable Triggers or Events |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Mon __/__/__ | | | | |
| Tue __/__/__ | | | | |
| Wed __/__/__ | | | | |
| Thu __/__/__ | | | | |
| Fri __/__/__ | | | | |
| Sat __/__/__ | | | | |
| Sun __/__/__ | | | | |

Weekly Reflection

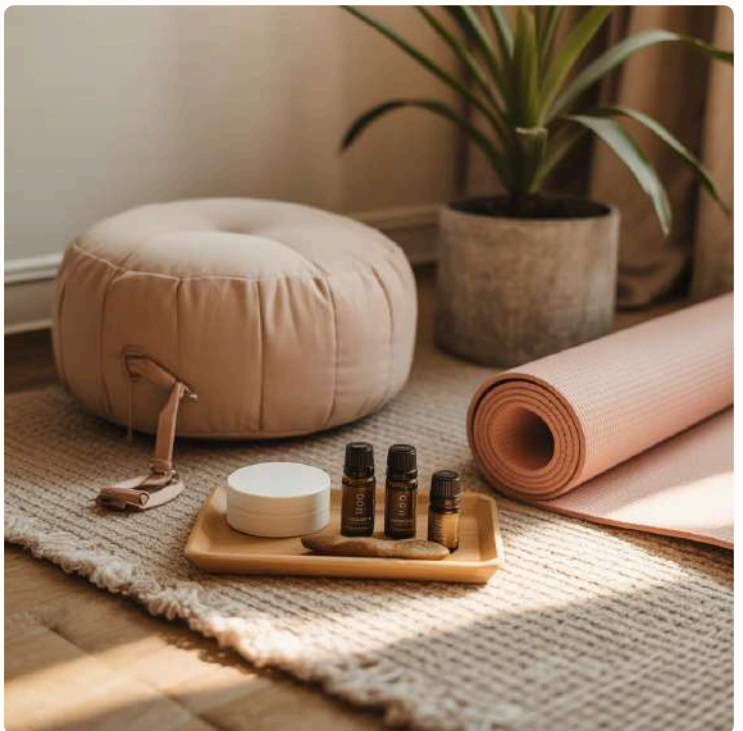
Looking back over this week, I notice that my pain was worse on days when:

One small thing that seemed to help, even a little, was:

Developing Personalised Coping Strategies

Now that you have some awareness of your triggers and patterns, you can begin building a personalised toolkit of strategies. These don't need to be dramatic or time-consuming—tiny, realistic actions count.

The following sections will guide you through immediate relief techniques, daily prevention habits, and longer-term wellness goals. Take your time. You can fill these sections in over several sittings.



"Small, consistent steps create meaningful change. There's no need to do everything at once."



Immediate Relief Techniques

These are tools to use *in the moment* when stress or pain spikes. They help soothe your nervous system and bring your body back to a calmer state.

For Stressful Moments

Things that help me when stress spikes:

(e.g. deep breathing, stepping outside, calling a friend, 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, hand on heart)

For Pain Flares

Things that help my body during a pain flare:

(e.g. heat pad, gentle stretching, changing position, rest, warm bath, lying down)

Prevention Strategies: Daily Habits

Regular practices can lower overall stress and pain sensitivity over time. These are investments in your nervous system's resilience—small acts of care that accumulate.

Habits That Support My Nervous System

(e.g. pacing activities, taking short breaks, gentle movement, time in nature, limiting screen time)

Habits That Support My Body and Pain Levels

(e.g. consistent sleep routine, staying hydrated, regular meals, avoiding bladder irritants, mindful posture)





Long-Term Wellness Goals

Think about 2–3 realistic goals that could support your wellbeing over the coming weeks or months. These should feel achievable and kind, not overwhelming.

01

Goal One

My goal:

Why this matters to me:

First tiny step I can take:

02

Goal Two

My goal:

Why this matters to me:

First tiny step I can take:

03

Goal Three

My goal:

Why this matters to me:

First tiny step I can take:

My Top Three Stress-Relief Activities

List three activities that genuinely help you feel calmer or more grounded. Include when and how you could use them.

1

Activity:

When I could use it:

2

Activity:

When I could use it:

3

Activity:

When I could use it:

Physical Pain Management Ideas

Movement and Stretches

Stretches or movements
that usually feel kind to
my body:

Temperature Therapies

Heat or cold therapy
that helps:

Other Comfort Measures

Cushions, posture
changes, rest strategies:





When to Seek Support

Reaching out for help is a strength, not a weakness. Support can come from healthcare professionals, trusted people in your life, or peer communities who understand what you're going through.

Healthcare Professionals I Might Want to Talk To

(e.g. GP, pain specialist, pelvic health physiotherapist, urologist, mental health professional, dietitian)

Supportive People in My Life

(Friends, family, colleagues, community members I trust)

Online or In-Person Support Groups

(IC support forums, chronic pain communities, local groups)

My Action Plan for This Week

Choose just a few small, realistic actions to try this week. You're not aiming for perfection—you're experimenting gently to see what helps.

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>This week, I commit to trying:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> | <p>This week, I commit to trying:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> | <p>This week, I commit to trying:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> |

Check-In Date

I will gently check in with myself on: ____ / ____ / ____


Progress Reflection

After trying your action plan, return here to reflect on what you learnt. Remember: this is about gathering information, not judging yourself.

What Seemed to Help

What Didn't Help or Felt Too Much

What I Want to Adjust Next Time

 **Gentle Reminder:** Managing stress and pain is a journey, not a test you have to pass. Small steps count. Every bit of self-awareness and kindness matters.

A Note to Myself

Take a moment to acknowledge yourself. Living with chronic pain takes courage, and simply being here with this workbook is an act of self-care.

One Thing I'm Proud of Myself For

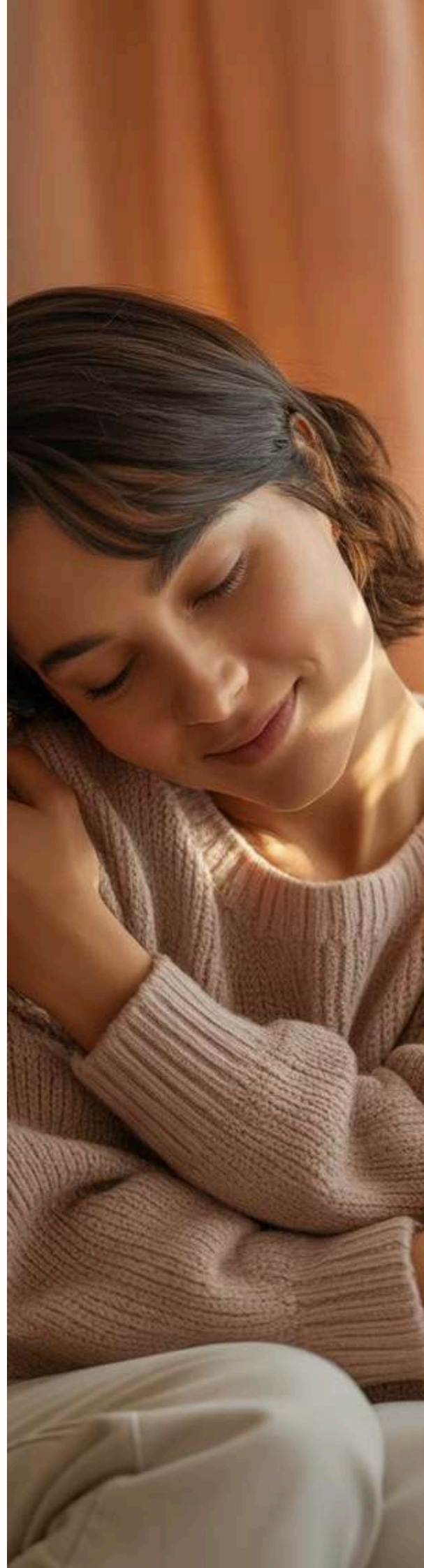
Even whilst going through pain, one thing I'm proud of myself for is:

What My Body Has Carried Me Through

Something my body has carried me through that I want to acknowledge is:

A Gentle Reminder for Difficult Days

A gentle reminder I want to come back to on difficult days is:



Notes

Use this space for any additional thoughts, patterns you've noticed, or reflections that didn't fit elsewhere.

[illegible]



Academic References

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Further Reading and Resources

Books and Guides

- **The Body Keeps the Score** by Bessel van der Kolk (2014) – An accessible exploration of how trauma and stress affect the body and nervous system.
- **Explain Pain** by David Butler and Lorimer Moseley (2013) – A patient-friendly guide to understanding the neuroscience of chronic pain.
- **Why We Hurt** by Aneesh Singla (2016) – A comprehensive look at the science and treatment of chronic pain.

Organisations and Websites

- **Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA)** – www.ichelp.org – Evidence-based resources, support forums, and information for people living with IC/BPS.
- **The British Pain Society** – www.britishpainsociety.org – Professional guidance and patient information on chronic pain management.
- **Pelvic Pain Support Network** – www.pelvicpain.org.uk – UK-based charity offering support and information for people with pelvic pain conditions.
- **Mind-Body Medicine resources** at Harvard Medical School – www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood – Reliable information on stress, the nervous system, and mind-body approaches.

❏ These resources are provided for information only and do not replace personalised medical advice. Always consult with your healthcare provider about your individual situation.



You've Reached the End



Thank you for taking the time to explore your stress–pain patterns with curiosity and compassion. The insights you've gathered here are valuable, regardless of how complete or "perfect" your responses feel.



Remember: healing and self-understanding are not linear. You can return to this workbook as often as you need, adapting and adjusting your strategies as you learn more about what helps your body and mind.



Be gentle with yourself. Small steps matter. You deserve care, support, and kindness—especially from yourself.

"Progress is not about perfection. It's about noticing, learning, and responding with kindness."

