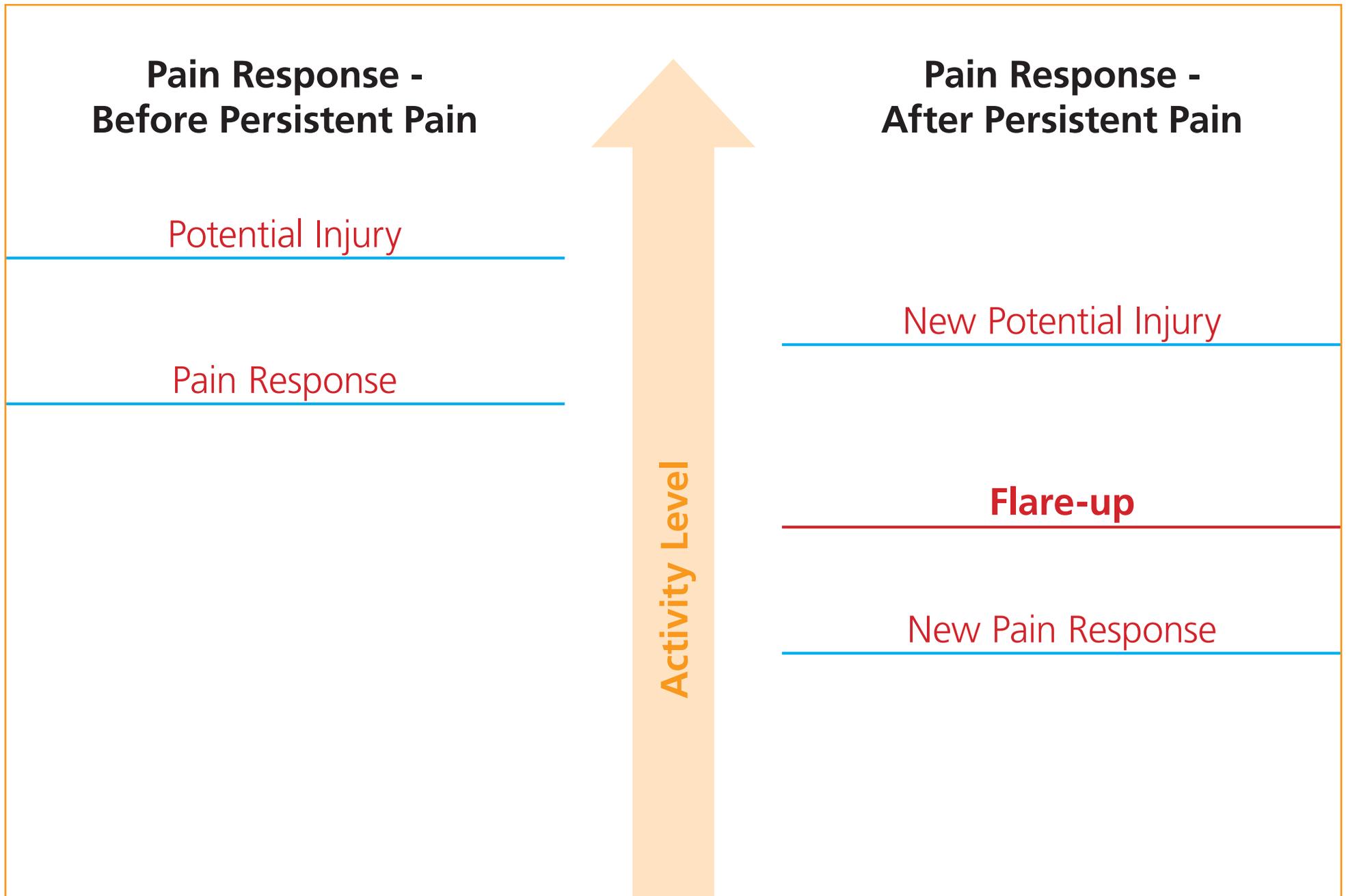


Rethinking Pain



One of the hardest things is to figure out how to get back to moving.

On the left, we see how much we used to be able to do (big things like sports, hiking, swimming, and little things like going to your grandkids soccer game, taking the dog for a walk). If we pushed really hard, like hiking for 8 hours, running a marathon, we might get some pain (Pain Line) and that would be a warning that we'd better pay attention and change what we're doing, time to take a break.

If we kept going, we would injure ourselves.

With persistent pain, the level at which you'd have injury is a little lower, because you haven't been moving as much as you had, maybe a little deconditioned. But look where that new pain level is! It's really low. All those things you would normally do, they are ringing the alarm bell, mobilizing the emergency response system, producing pain.

But you're not even close to injuring yourself. So you're sore but you're safe.

So, let's think about building up activity. Say you want to get back to walking. And walking 20 minutes causes you to have a flareup that lasts a week.

What about 10 minutes? What about 5 minutes? 5 minutes may seem like a small amount, but it is a great start. And you may have pain with this activity, but you aren't harming yourself. We start there.

If you do have a flareup, you don't back off, because you are "sore but safe." But you do learn from that experience. Did you not sleep the night before, have a fight w your spouse, walk more than you thought? But you stay with 5 min, maybe 2 x a day, for a week. Your system is a little more resilient and that pain response level goes up a little, and your flareup level goes up a little, and you go up to 6 minutes. Then one more minute a week later. Steadily your ability to do more goes up and up. You are still having pain, and maybe the same amount of pain, but you are doing more. Slowly your pain will often go down as well. Remember to give yourself a lot of positive reinforcement!

Clinician: Remember to ask about this at next session and to give positive reinforcement for any gains.