



Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is different than acute pain. Chronic pain is pain that continues for weeks, months or even years. Chronic pain can make normal daily activities a challenge.

Chronic Pain and Acute Pain

Acute pain is normal pain that alerts you that something is hurt or ill and needs to be taken care of, such as a cut, a sprain, a broken bone, or an infection.

Acute pain usually requires immediate treatment like a bandage, a cast or medication. Once the injury or illness is healed the acute pain stops.

Chronic pain may or may not be related to a specific injury or illness. Chronic pain lasts long after the injury or illness is healed, or develops for no known reason. Pain signals keep being sent from the nervous system like a recording or CD that is scratched and keeps skipping at the same spot.

Chronic pain must be treated differently than acute pain and often treatments are different for each person.

Treatment of Chronic Pain

Chronic pain must usually be treated with multiple approaches, which means using a few different treatments together. The best combination of treatments can be different for each person.

Your health care provider can help you figure out the best combination of treatments for you. Following are treatments that can help:

- Medication(s)
- Physical therapy
- Behavioral therapy
- Change of diet or nutrition
- Stress management or relaxation techniques
- Exercise
- Heat and/or ice
- Massage or acupuncture
- Yoga or movement classes

Chronic Pain Syndrome

As chronic pain continues, other symptoms or problems can develop. Often normal, daily activities become difficult and this can lead to muscle atrophy (weakness), change in posture, pain in other areas of the body, anger, depression, or change in self-esteem. All these symptoms are called chronic pain syndrome.

Treatment of Chronic Pain

Many people with chronic pain can be helped. Often the pain does not go away completely, but people learn how to keep their pain levels down so they can function.

Functioning means being able to do most normal daily activities you need to do. Functioning also means you are doing at least some of the things you enjoy doing.

Keeping Your Pain Level Down

Identify Your Triggers

Pain triggers are things that make your pain worse or stop your pain from getting better. For many people, some or most of the following will trigger pain:

- Stress – such as pressure from work, family, money, or your community
- Poor diet – such as too much sugar, fat or unhealthy foods
- Lack of enough sleep – less than 7 hours of sleep per night
- Taking medication improperly – such as not taking medication on time
- Trying to do too much – such as taking care of too many other people or not getting help with things that are too difficult.

Avoid Triggers

To avoid triggers you can:

- Ask for help from your family, friends, community, church and/or health care provider with things that you can no longer do or need help with
- Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep, or more, per night (people with pain need more sleep)
- Take your medication as prescribed by your health care provider
- Keep your stress level as low as possible
- Do relaxation or breathing methods – ask your health care provider for instructions or handouts on relaxation or breathing methods
- Ask your health care provider about seeing a behavioral therapist or a counselor, or joining a support group.

Keep a Diary of Your Pain

Write down the following in your pain diary each day:

- Where, how bad, and how often your pain occurs
- What makes the pain better or worse
- Problems with sleep, mood, or anxiety
- How well you can function with daily activities.