



Chronic Pain

Guide to Good Health

Healthy Living Guide

- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
- ▶ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- ▶ Coronary Artery Disease (CAD)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Hyperlipidemia
- ▶ Hypertension
- ▶ Osteoarthritis (OA)
- ▶ Osteoporosis
- ▶ Type 2 Diabetes
- ▶ Back Pain
- ▶ Chronic Pain
- ▶ Healthy Eating
- ▶ Healthy Pregnancy
- ▶ Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)
- ▶ Sleep
- ▶ Smoking Cessation
- ▶ Stress Management
- ▶ Weight Management
- ▶ Bariatric Surgery

What is Chronic Pain?

While acute pain is a normal sensation triggered in the nervous system to alert you to possible injury and the need to take care of yourself, chronic pain is different. Chronic pain persists. Pain signals keep firing in the nervous system for weeks, months, even years. There may have been an initial mishap -- sprained back, serious infection, or there may be an ongoing cause of pain -- arthritis, cancer, ear infection, but some people suffer chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage. Many chronic pain conditions affect older adults.

Common chronic pain complaints include headache, low back pain, cancer pain, arthritis pain, neurogenic pain (pain resulting from damage to the peripheral nerves or to the central nervous system itself), psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside or outside the nervous system).

Overview & Facts

- Chronic pain affects approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population and 50 percent of patients with cancer.
- Almost three-fifths of adults 65 and older with pain in the United States said it had lasted for one year or more.

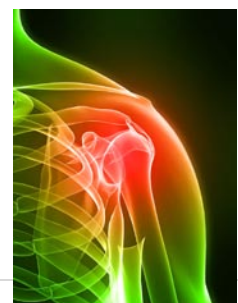
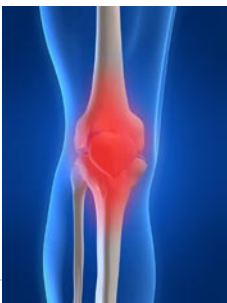


Signs & Symptoms

- ✓ Pain that does not go away as expected after an illness or injury.
- ✓ Pain that may be described as shooting, burning, aching, or electrical.
- ✓ Discomfort, soreness, tightness, or stiffness.
- ✓ Pain can lead to other problems, such as:
 - Fatigue, which can cause impatience and a loss of motivation.
 - Sleeplessness, often because the pain keeps you awake during the night.
 - Withdrawal from activity and an increased need to rest.
 - A weakened immune system, leading to frequent infections or illness.
 - Depression, which is common and can make your pain worse.
 - Other mood changes, such as hopelessness, fear, irritability, anxiety, and stress.
 - Disability, which may include not being able to go to work or school or perform other daily activities.

Causes

- Chronic pain can be caused by many different factors. Often conditions that accompany normal aging may affect bones and joints in ways that cause chronic pain. Other common causes are nerve damage and injuries that fail to heal properly.
- Disease can also be the underlying cause of chronic pain. Rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis are well-known culprits, but persistent pain may also be due to such ailments as cancer, multiple sclerosis, stomach ulcers, AIDS, and gallbladder disease.
- In many cases, however, the source of chronic pain can be a very complex and even mysterious issue to untangle. Although it may begin with an injury or illness, ongoing pain can develop a psychological dimension after the physical problem has healed. This fact alone makes pinning down a single course of treatment tricky, and it is why health care providers often find they have to try a number of different types of curative steps.



Risk Factors

Controllable

- Years of poor posture
- Being overweight, which puts excess strain on the back and knees
- Sleeping on a poor mattress



- Cigarette Smoking
- Improper lifting and carrying of heavy objects
- Wearing high heels

Uncontrollable

- 45 years of age or older
- Female sex
- Pregnancy
- A congenital condition such as curvature of the spine
- Traumatic injury
- Ordinary aging of the spine (degenerative changes)



Questions to Ask/Items to Share with Your Provider

1. Should I be taking over-the-counter pain relievers?
2. Are there any other self-care measures that can ease my pain?
3. Will I need to see a specialist?
4. How quickly can I expect relief?
5. Is it possible that the pain will come back?
6. What should I do if it does?
7. Are there any other symptoms that I should be watching for?
8. Is it possible that emotional distress is contributing to my pain?
9. If so, what's the best way to get help?

Items

- Tell your provider the level of discomfort you've been having over the last week or months. Usually the pain scale is from zero to ten, where ten is the most painful and zero is no pain.
- Share with your provider how you're feeling with this particular level of pain
- Include both the lowest and highest levels of pain you have experienced in the last day, week or month
- Share with your provider the location of your pain, and whether or not the pain radiates (appears connected) to other areas of your body



Diagnostic Workup

- Chronic pain is usually not diagnosed until you have regularly been in pain for three to six months. This wait can be frustrating when you are in pain without a good medical explanation. Unfortunately, diagnosing chronic pain is not easy.
- Because the process of finding a cause for your pain can be daunting, you may be tempted to stop looking altogether. Try, however, to stick with it for as long as you can. Simply eliminating potential diseases and disorders can help you understand where your pain is not coming from, even if the true source is never actually discovered. This can make treating your pain more effective.
- Over time, your doctor will perform a number of different tests which may include blood work, imaging and nerve testing. What tests he performs depends on where your pain is located and what he suspects is causing it, in addition to your other symptoms.

Treatment and Care

The treatments for chronic pain are as diverse as the causes. From over-the-counter and prescription drugs to mind/body techniques to acupuncture, if one approach doesn't work, another one might. But when it comes to treating chronic pain, no single technique is guaranteed to produce complete pain relief. Relief may be found by using a combination of treatment options.

1. Medical

- *Trigger Point Therapy:* Trigger point injection is a procedure used to treat painful areas of muscle that contain trigger points, or knots of muscle that form when muscles do not relax. During this procedure, a health care provider, using a small needle, injects a local anesthetic that sometimes includes a steroid into a trigger point. With the injection, the trigger point is made inactive and the pain is alleviated. Usually, a brief course of treatment will result in sustained relief.
- *Surgical Implants:* When standard medicines and physical therapy fail to offer adequate pain relief, you may be a candidate for a surgical implant of a pain control device.
- *TENS:* Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation therapy, more commonly referred to as TENS, uses electrical stimulation to diminish pain. During the procedure, low-voltage electrical current is delivered through electrodes that are placed on the skin near the source of pain. The electricity from the electrodes stimulates the nerves in an affected area and sends signals to the brain that "scramble" normal pain signals. TENS is not painful and may be effective therapy to mask pain such as diabetic neuropathy.
- *Bioelectric Therapy:* Bioelectric therapy relieves pain by blocking pain messages to the brain. Bioelectric therapy also prompts the body to produce chemicals called endorphins that decrease or eliminate painful sensations by blocking the message of pain from being delivered to the brain.



2. Pharmacological: Prescription and Non-Prescription

- Milder forms of pain may be relieved by over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin. Both acetaminophen and NSAIDs relieve pain caused by muscle aches and stiffness, but only NSAIDs can also reduce inflammation (swelling and irritation). Topical pain relievers are also available, such as creams, lotions, or sprays that are applied to the skin in order to relieve pain from sore muscles and arthritis.
- If over-the-counter drugs do not provide relief, your doctor may prescribe stronger medications, such as muscle relaxants, anti-anxiety drugs, antidepressants (musculoskeletal pain), prescription NSAIDs, or a short course of stronger painkillers. A limited number of steroid injections at the site of a joint problem can reduce swelling and inflammation.

3. Emotional/Psychological

- When you are in pain, you may have feelings of anger, sadness, hopelessness, and/or despair. Pain can alter your personality, disrupt your sleep, and interfere with your work and relationships. In turn, depression and anxiety, lack of sleep, and feelings of stress can all make pain worse. Psychological treatment provides safe, nondrug methods that can treat your pain directly by reducing high levels of physiological stress that often aggravate pain. Psychological treatment also helps improve the indirect consequences of pain by helping you learn how to cope with the many problems associated with pain.
- A large part of psychological treatment for pain is education, helping patients acquire skills to manage a very difficult problem.



4. Physical

- *Physical Therapy:* Physical therapy helps to relieve pain by using special techniques that improve movement and function impaired by an injury or disability. Along with employing stretching and pain-relieving techniques, a physical therapist may use, among other things, TENS to aid treatment.
- *Exercise:* Although resting for short periods can alleviate pain, too much rest may actually increase pain and put you at greater risk of injury when you again attempt movement. Research has shown that regular exercise can diminish pain in the long term by improving muscle tone, strength, and flexibility. Exercise may also cause a release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Some exercises are easier for certain chronic pain sufferers to perform than others; try swimming, biking, walking, rowing, and yoga.

5. Nutritional

- Eat a well balanced diet with adequate amounts of B vitamins and Vitamin D. Eating plant foods that contain anti-inflammatory agents (colorful fruits and vegetables, the darker and more colorful, the better) can help ease pain by limiting inflammation. If you are overweight, losing weight can be very helpful.

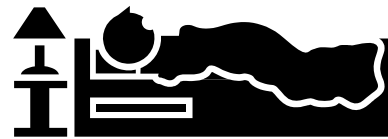
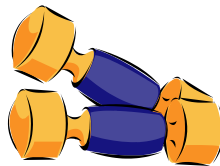


6. Alternative Therapies

- In the past decade, strong evidence has accumulated regarding the benefits of mind-body therapies, acupuncture, and some nutritional supplements for treating pain. Other alternative therapies such as massage, chiropractic therapies, therapeutic touch, certain herbal therapies, and dietary approaches have the potential to alleviate pain in some people. However, the evidence supporting these therapies is less concrete.

Healthy Lifestyle Management

- ✓ Practice good posture
- ✓ Practice strategies to keep your back safe and healthy when lifting and carrying heavy objects
- ✓ Lose excess weight because it can put extra strain on your back and knees
- ✓ Wear sensible shoes and avoid high heels
- ✓ Adequate sleep to allow the body to restore itself and promote good health
- ✓ Don't sleep on a poor mattress
- ✓ Quit smoking or using tobacco products
- ✓ Take medications as prescribed
- ✓ Exercise regularly, get up and move periodically
- ✓ Limit caffeine and alcohol
- ✓ Practice stress management strategies of choice (read, yoga, deep breathing, laugh, play)



Resources

- ❖ American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA): <http://www.theacpa.org>
- ❖ American Pain Society (APS): <http://www.ampainsoc.org>
- ❖ Arthritis Foundation: <http://www.arthritis.org>
- ❖ Fibromyalgia Network: <http://www.fmnetnews.com>
- ❖ National Cancer Institute (NCI): <http://cancer.gov>
- ❖ National Chronic Pain Outreach Association (NCPOA): <http://www.chronicpain.org>
- ❖ National Fibromyalgia Association: <http://www.fmaware.org>
- ❖ National Foundation for the Treatment of Pain: <http://www.paincare.org>
- ❖ National Headache Foundation: <http://www.headaches.org>
- ❖ National Multiple Sclerosis Society: <http://www.nationalmssociety.org>
- ❖ National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD): <http://www.rarediseases.org>
- ❖ United Cerebral Palsy (UCP): <http://www.ucp.org>