

## Chronic Pain

***“Hope is not lost. We are not crazy. We are not broken, nor weak, nor fragile, nor damaged goods.”***

### WHAT IS CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts longer than six months. Chronic pain can range from mild to excruciating, episodic to continuous, merely inconvenient to totally incapacitating. It can be described as burning, tingling, knife-like, aching, electrical, sharp, or dull. With chronic pain, signals of pain remain active in the nervous system for months or even years. This can take both a physical and emotional toll on a person.

The most common areas of pain are headaches, joint pain, soft tissue injuries, and backaches. Other kinds of chronic pain include tendinitis, sinus pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and pain affecting specific parts of the body, such as the shoulders, pelvis, and neck. Generalized muscle or nerve pain can also develop into a chronic condition, i.e. fibromyalgia, peripheral neuropathies, autonomic nervous system dysfunction, and others.

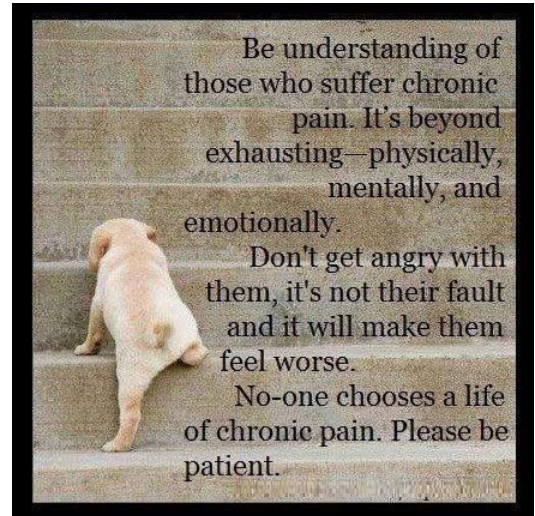
The emotional toll of chronic pain can make the pain even worse. Anxiety, stress, depression, anger, and fatigue interact in complex ways with chronic pain and may decrease the body’s production of natural painkillers; moreover, such negative feelings may increase the level of substances that amplify sensations of pain, causing a vicious cycle. Pain is not usually an isolated symptom.

### THE PAIN CYCLE

Persistent pain → Being less active → Loss of fitness, weak muscles and joint tissues → Lack of energy and tiredness → Stress, anxiety, fear, anger, and frustration → Negative thoughts about pain and the future → Depression and mood swings → Time off work, money worries, and relationship concerns.

### OTHER PAIN-ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

- Fatigue
- Sleeplessness
- Withdrawal from activity
- Increased need to rest
- Weakened immune system
- Changes in mood including hopelessness, fear, depression, irritability, anxiety



- Disability

## **COPING WITH CHRONIC PAIN**

The first step is to learn all you can about your condition. Understanding your pain is the first step to reducing it. Next, take an active role in your recovery. Talk with your doctor about medical treatments that might reduce your pain. But if these treatments can't completely heal you, don't give up hope. New modes of treatment are always being researched and developed, and no one doctor or therapist knows it all. Consider other opinions. Also consider alternative methods of treatment that range outside of the mainstream of medical care, such as pain-relieving herbal preparations, regenerative therapies, and others.

## **MANAGE STRESS AND YOUR EMOTIONS**

Our bodies and minds are connected. Stress, tension and stirred emotions can aggravate pain. Find ways to reduce stress in your life; deal with your troubling emotions and your pain likely will decrease. Deep breathing, visualization and other relaxation techniques can help you calm your mind and reduce your pain.

## **GET MORE EXERCISE**

Exercise leads to a healthier body, and a healthier body feels less pain. Strong, toned muscles feel less pain than unused muscles. Also, exercise will give you more energy and internal pain-relieving chemicals (endorphins) that you need to overcome the pain. Less tangible is the fact that when you're fitter, you'll feel better about yourself — more in control — and that can mean a lot. Be sure to talk to your doctor about exercise that is safe for you.

## **CONTROL YOUR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Specific activities or body movements may aggravate your pain more than others. Limiting or excluding those movements from your day can reduce your pain a great deal. If the painful movements involve important household, personal, or work activities, consider using adaptive equipment that will let you perform the same activity without using the same painful motion. Avoid the "weekend-warrior" mentality, which thinks that since I used to be able to do it, I should still be able to do it, even if out of shape and out of practice. That mentality may result in reinjuries to painful areas of the body.

## **IMPROVE YOUR DIET**

Dietary choices can play a significant role in chronic pain. Many causes of chronic pain are related to excess inflammation in the areas of the body where the pain is. And some foods are well known to worsen inflammation in the body. Some of those more notorious foods include fast foods, junk foods, fried foods, sweets, pastries, smoked and prepared foods, and others. A simple Google

search of inflammatory foods may be eye-opening. In general, the more natural the food is, the better. Fruits and vegetables are especially helpful to counteract inflammation.

## FIND SOURCES FOR SUPPORT

Chronic pain can make you feel isolated and afraid. You may feel like you're all alone. That couldn't be further from the truth. But it's estimated that one in three people suffer from chronic pain. Contact others who also suffer chronic pain to share what you know, and to learn from them. You'll learn ways to cope. You'll learn that the pain you feel, and the emotions that come with it, are not unusual. Chronic pain support groups can be a great way to get this important human contact. Finally, look beyond the pain. Don't let your pain consume your life. There are more important things in your life to focus on, such as friends, family, work, and hobbies. Talk to your doctor about the ideas mentioned above and start taking back control of your life. As you begin to refocus, the pain will decrease, and you will have improved quality of life.

**If you have any questions about this topic, please reach out to CompassionLink at [info@compassionlink.org](mailto:info@compassionlink.org). We will be happy to answer your questions.**

---

## RESOURCES

<http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/understanding-pain-management-chronic-pain>

<http://www.health.com/health/chronic-pain>

<http://theacpa.org>