

Understanding Chronic Pain

There are two types of pain: acute and chronic. Acute pain is a type of pain that tells someone when their body may be injured. It normally goes away as the body heals and doesn't last too long. Chronic pain is a type of pain that normally last for more than 12 weeks. It can originally come from:

- an injury, such as a sprained back or a serious infection
- arthritis-inflammation or swelling of joints
- headaches and migraines
- cancer

Sometimes, there is not a clear reason for the pain. Chronic pain can keep a person from carrying out their everyday activities because of their limited movements, flexibility, and strength.

Diagnosing Chronic Pain

There is no test to exactly measure or locate pain. Doctors or health care providers may use technology and tests, but most of rely on how you describe your pain. Since chronic pain may appear in many parts of your body and for different reasons, you will need to describe the pain as well as you can and let your doctor or health care provider know what makes it better or worse. Some questions your doctor or health care provider may ask are:

- Where does it hurt?
- How often does it hurt? Is a constant or on-and-off pain?
- Is the pain sharp or dull?
- Is it burning or aching?

Treatment for Chronic Pain

There is no cure for chronic pain, but there are ways of managing it. The goal is to lower the amount of pain, reduce how often it happens, and improve your body's functioning so you can continue your everyday activities. The following treatments are some ways to manage chronic pain:

- **Medicine:** Your doctor or health care provider may give you medications, such as pain relievers, antidepressants, or anticonvulsants. Each has its own advantages and risks, depending on the type of pain you have and your body's reaction to them. Out of these types of medications, pain relievers are more commonly used. There are three general types of pain relievers:
 1. **Acetaminophen:** Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) are found in both over-the-counter and prescription pain medicines. When using this medication, patients have to keep track of the amount that they take because it may damage your liver. Therefore, it is important to let your doctor know if the medicine and treatment is not working for you.
 2. **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs):** Some examples of NSAIDs are aspirin, ibuprofen (such as Motrin or Advil), and naproxen (such as Aleve). When these medications are taken regularly, they build up in your blood and help lower the pain that comes from inflammation (swelling). They should always be taken with food or milk because of its possible side effects, including easy bruising, bleeding in the stomach, and kidney damage.
- **Narcotics:** Narcotic medications (such as tramadol) are the most powerful pain relievers. However, these medications can be addictive so it is important to carefully follow your

doctor's or health care provider's instructions. You should also let them know if you notice any changes while taking these medications, such as having a hard time concentrating or thinking clearly. When taking narcotics, it's important to remember that there is a difference between being physically dependent and psychologically addicted to these medications. When you are physically dependent, your body needs the narcotic to work correctly. Psychological addiction is the desire to use a drug whether you're in pain or not. Using a narcotic this way can be dangerous and may not help you manage pain.

- **Alternative treatments:** Taking medications is not the only way to treat chronic pain. Your doctor or health care provider may also suggest other treatments. Some examples are:
 - **Osteopathic manipulation (OMT)**-moving certain joints and muscles to fix structural problems in the body that may cause pain
 - **Acupuncture**-using really small needles at certain spots on your body to lower pain
 - **Massage therapy**
 - **Cognitive-behavioral therapy**- coping with your pain through methods that help you relax and stay positive, such as meditation, tai chi, and yoga
 - **Nerve blocks**-using drugs or techniques to block pain messages between your body and your brain
 - **Electrical stimulation**-using electrical pulses to cause changes in muscles and nerves
 - **Biofeedback**-teaching patients to control their body and their responses to pain

- **Self-management programs:** Another way to manage pain is self management programs.

Self management programs give a patient an active role in controlling their pain. It also involves a team of professionals and possibly loved ones. Some professionals may include:

- Doctors or health care providers
- Nurses
- Psychologists
- Nutritionists
- A variety of therapists

These programs use a holistic approach in treating patients. A holistic approach treats a person as a whole being, body and mind. With the help of the patient's team, they can make an action plan that depends on their lifestyle. It may include:

- Eating healthy
- Thinking positively
- Getting good quality sleep
- Having physical activity and exercising
- Quitting smoking
- Balancing life
- Building healthy relationships
- Managing medications

These strategies can really help a patient to cope with pain because they learn to think about pain in different ways and how to react to it effectively.

Resources

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