Managing Chronic Pain
A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

Featuring Donna Mills
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“Pain upsets and destroys the nature of the person who feels it.”

--Aristotle

What is Chronic Pain?

Complaints of pain are the #1 reason people go to the doctor. In fact, pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined. Pain is often caused by an injury such as a cut, broken bone, or infection. This kind of pain can be intense, but it does not usually last very long. It is called acute pain.

If pain remains even after an injury has healed or if it continues for longer than expected, it is called chronic pain. About 70 million people suffer from chronic pain in the U.S. alone. Chronic pain can be frustrating and exhausting. It can become the focus of your life. Work, play, and relationships can suffer.

The good news is that today most chronic pain conditions can be treated. The pain can be managed. You can return to doing the things you did before the pain began. This booklet will tell you how to get the help you need. It reviews non-surgical treatments for most chronic pain conditions. (Chronic pain caused by cancer or pain at the end-of-life will not be covered here.)

As you learn to manage chronic pain, keep these goals in mind:

**Be educated**—learn as much as you can about your pain and possible treatments.

**Be responsible**—follow your doctor’s advice regarding all aspects of treatment; if medications are required, follow all prescription information.

**Be confident**—you can manage your pain and return to the life you knew.
One difficult thing about pain is that it can’t be measured.

No test or device can measure how much you hurt.

The Puzzle of Pain

Pain is the body’s alarm system. It tells us when something is wrong. It is very helpful when it works well. But sometimes the alarm never shuts off. And sometimes the alarm system breaks—it sends signals even when all is well. This is called chronic pain.

One difficult thing about pain is that it can’t be measured. No test or device can measure how much you hurt. That’s why most doctors agree that “pain is what the patient says it is.” But even describing pain can be hard.

Pain comes in many “flavors”—burning, shooting, dull, sharp, prickly, throbbing, and many others. Sometimes the source of pain is clear. But often a physical cause cannot be found. Some people worry that a doctor will think their pain is “all in their head.” Most doctors know better. They will take your pain seriously and work hard to find a solution.
Finding Out What’s Wrong

When you visit your doctor, he or she will ask you questions about your pain. The questions will help him or her understand the pain. You may be asked:

- Where does it hurt?
- Does the pain move from place to place?
- Do you have pain in more than one place?
- When does the pain happen?
- How long does it last?
- Does the pain come and go?
- Have you had this pain before?
- Does the pain keep you from doing all you want to do?
- Does the pain disrupt your sleep?
- Has your mood changed because of the pain?
- Are your relationships being affected by the pain?
- What do you think is causing the pain?
- What makes the pain better?
- What makes it worse?

The answers to these questions help the doctor find possible causes.

You may also be asked to rate your pain on a scale of some kind. Some scales use faces showing different expressions:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
0 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\
\text{No pain} & \text{Moderate pain} & \text{Worst pain possible}
\end{array}
\]

PAIN 2001; 93:173-183. Used with permission from IASP®. The instructions for administration are currently available in over 24 languages from www.painsourcebook.ca.
Pain Relief is Not the Only Goal

If you are in pain, you want it to stop. That’s an understandable goal! But pain relief is not the only goal in treating chronic pain. Sometimes people stop doing things because of pain. They stop exercising, working, walking, or even just sleeping in their own bed. Full recovery means regaining functions lost to chronic pain. Reducing pain is often just the first step.

Your recovery will be measured by how well you reach functional goals such as:

- Sleeping without waking from pain
- Returning to work
- Going to physical therapy
- Having sex
- Walking without help
- Climbing stairs

You and your doctor will together set goals that are right for you. The key is finding the right balance between your goals and the treatments needed to achieve those goals.

After talking with you, your doctor may suggest more tests, such as x-rays or other types of body scans. These may uncover the source of the pain. But even if a cause cannot be found, your pain is real! And even when the source is unknown, the pain can almost always be managed.

Your doctor may also suggest that you see a pain specialist. Many areas have special centers for treating pain. (You can locate the center nearest you from the website of the American Pain Foundation, provided at the end of this booklet.) Many people with chronic pain rely on a team that might include:

- Their doctor
- A pain specialist
- A clinical pharmacist
- A physical therapist
- A mental health worker
- Specialists in other disorders like diabetes or heart disease

Treating chronic pain is a marathon, not a sprint!
Medications for Pain Relief

Medications that relieve pain are called **analgesics**. Analgesics are the mainstay of pain management. But many non-drug treatments can also be used with medications. Combining such treatments may reduce pain intensity, boost your ability to cope, enhance your comfort and improve your quality of life. Your healthcare professional may suggest non-drug techniques such as heat or cold, physical therapy, exercise, meditation, diversion therapy (for example, singing), or working with a mental health specialist.

There are many types of analgesics. You can buy some in stores. Others require a prescription. This section will explain common types of analgesics.

**Aspirin**

Aspirin was discovered and first used more than a century ago. It remains one of the most widely-used pain relievers in the world.

**Advantages**
- Relieves minor to moderate pain, fever, headaches, and swelling
- Inexpensive
- No prescription needed

**Disadvantages**
- Can cause stomach upset or bleeding in the stomach
- Can cause kidney damage if taken at high doses or for a long time
- May cause adverse reactions in people with asthma

**Acetaminophen**

Acetaminophen is a non-aspirin pain reliever. It is used alone for mild to moderate pain. It is also combined with other types of pain medications for more serious pain.

**Advantages**
- Relieves minor to moderate pain, headaches, and fever
- Little or no stomach upset or bleeding
- Inexpensive
- No prescription needed

**Disadvantages**
- Does not reduce swelling
- Can cause liver and kidney damage if taken in excessive doses

(Always let your doctor know what medications, how much and how often you are taking both prescription drugs and "store-bought"—so-called ‘over-the-counter’—medicines. Many have acetaminophen in them that you might not be aware of).
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

This is a large family of medicines that work in a similar way to aspirin by relieving both pain and swelling. This class includes drugs such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and celecoxib. Some are available without a prescription.

*Advantages*
- Relieve mild to moderate pain, fever, headaches, and swelling

*Disadvantages*
- Can cause stomach upset or bleeding in stomach
- Can cause kidney or liver damage if taken at high doses or for a long time
- May cause adverse reactions in people with asthma
- Can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke (an exception is low-dose aspirin, that reduces the risk of heart attack in certain people who are at high risk for heart disease)

Opioid medications

Medicines containing opioids have been used for centuries. Opioids—such as morphine, oxycodone and others—are strong pain medicines for moderate to severe pain. Today, opioids come in many forms and strengths. Some work very quickly but don’t last very long. Some give long-lasting pain relief. And some are less likely to be overused or used by non-patients.

Talk to your doctor about what type of opioid would be best for you. All opioids require a prescription.

Opioids usually produce some side effects. At first, the drugs can cause stomach upset or sleepiness. These side effects often go away as you get used to the drugs.

Other side effects, such as constipation, don’t lessen with time. Constipation can be prevented or lessened by taking a laxative on a regular basis.

Used properly, opioid medications may make it possible for people with chronic pain to “return to normal”—getting back to work, walking or running, playing sports, and doing other activities.

Opioid Myths

**Myth:** Opioid medications are always addicting.

**Fact:** Many studies show that opioids are rarely addicting when used properly for the management of chronic pain.

**Myth:** Opioids make it harder to function normally.

**Fact:** When used correctly for appropriate conditions, opioids may make it easier for people to live normally.

**Myth:** Opioid doses have to get bigger over time because the body gets used to them.

**Fact:** Unless the underlying cause of your pain gets worse (such as with cancer or arthritis), you will probably remain on the same dose or only need small increases over time.
Other types of medications

Many types of drugs relieve pain. Some have special effects that can be very helpful for some people. For example, some medicines improve mood and relieve pain. This can be good for people who are depressed and in pain. Here are three types of drugs your healthcare professional might suggest:

- Drugs that improve mood (antidepressants)
- Drugs that give you more energy (stimulants)
- Drugs that relieve anxiety (anxiolytics)

These drugs may be combined with other pain medications. Sometimes a combination of drugs works better than a single drug.

Responsible Prescription Use

Some young people today use prescription drugs to get “high” or to relieve stress. They may steal those drugs from parents, friends, or relatives. If you are taking an opioid medication for pain, you must be careful. Follow this advice:

- Store medications in a safe place
- Notice if any pills seem to be missing
- Never share your medication with others
- Don’t take more of a medication—or more often—than prescribed

Being responsible also means knowing yourself. Be aware of how you react to your medication. Are you having any unusual side effects? Is the medication working as well as you think it should? Your goal is always to balance the benefits of a drug with the side effects the drug might cause. If you have any questions, call your doctor or other healthcare professional.
Alternative Methods of Pain Relief

Many Americans have tried alternative ways to try to control their pain, such as acupuncture or hypnosis. Some of these methods have been shown to work for some patients. Most alternative treatments rely on the power of the mind to control pain. These methods are often used together with medications and other “traditional” treatments.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture uses very fine needles inserted into the skin. Needles are placed according to theories developed in China more than 2000 years ago. Some scientific studies show that acupuncture can relieve chronic pain. The evidence is most clear for back, neck, and arthritis pain.

Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a range of techniques that can alter a person’s awareness of themselves or their surroundings. It was first used over 100 years ago to help patients in pain. Scientific study of hypnosis continues, but some early results are promising. When a patient is hypnotized, his or her mind is focused and aware. For reasons that are not yet understood, this state can relieve many types of pain.

Meditation

Meditation is any method of focusing and calming the mind. It need not have any religious or spiritual component. Several medical centers now use meditation to help patients manage chronic pain. The techniques vary, but all involve calming the body, being aware of oneself, and focusing attention. Some scientific studies have shown “dramatic” reductions in pain among patients who meditate regularly.
Tips for Managing Chronic Pain

People in chronic pain can almost always be helped these days. With the right treatments and a good healthcare team, most people can return to the activities they enjoy. There are many things you can do to secure your progress and prevent future pain. The choices you make can make a big difference! Keep the following tips in mind:

**Exercise regularly.** Keeping your muscles strong will help prevent future injury. Start slow and easy. Work up gradually to more distance, time, or weight. The type of exercise is less important than doing some kind every day.

**Stay flexible.** Talk to your doctor about stretching exercises you can do every day. Yoga can be a great way to become more flexible. Just be careful to stretch gently. If it hurts, you’re going too far!

**Learn how to lift, sit, and stand.** Keep your back straight when lifting. Use your legs, not your back! Keep your back straight when sitting and standing. If you use a computer, be sure that the position of your arms and hands is relaxed and well-supported.

**Connect with others.** It can be hard for others to understand what it feels like to be in chronic pain. That’s why it can be so helpful to find people who can “share your pain.” Chronic pain support groups can be found in almost every city. You can also find online support groups. People can share their feelings and swap tips that have helped them manage their pain. (You can find support groups through the organizations listed at the back of this booklet.)

**Lose weight if you need to.** Extra body weight strains joints, muscles, and your back. Even losing just 10 pounds can make a difference!
Pain Medicine Specialists

Pain Medicine is a fairly new medical field. It is focused on helping people in chronic pain. Pain specialists are physicians with extra training in pain medicine. These doctors use many types of treatments to stop pain, including:

- Medications taken by mouth
- Injections of medication
- Physical therapy
- Medical devices
- Counseling and therapy

Pain specialists try to restore patients to their normal day-to-day activities. They are trained to treat the whole person, not just the pain. They try to give a balance of different treatments that are tailored for each person’s needs.

Working With Your Doctor

Your own doctor will be a key member of your healthcare team. She or he will know you best. You should feel comfortable talking with your doctor. The talking should be a two-way street. You need your doctor’s expert opinion and advice. In turn, he or she needs accurate information from you and your cooperation with all treatments.

Always be honest about your pain! Some people are afraid to tell their doctor how they really feel. They don’t want to look “weak” or be seen as a “complainer.” Such fears must be overcome. They block progress toward real pain relief.
Reasons for Hope

The key messages of this program are to be educated, responsible, and confident. Chronic pain can almost always be managed! It may take some time to find the best balance between your goals and a treatment program. But if you stick with it, you can overcome your pain.

Remember that you have a right to adequate and effective pain relief. Nobody should suffer with needless pain today. Work closely with your doctor. Determine if you should see a pain specialist. Use a team of healthcare professionals who can give you what you need.

By reading this booklet, you have begun learning about your condition. You can be confident now that relief from chronic pain is within your reach.
Resources for Patients

American Academy of Pain Medicine
The AAPM is the largest medical specialty society involved in education, training, advocacy, and research in the comprehensive specialty of Pain Medicine. To find a board certified pain physician, visit the Academy’s Website at www.painmed.org.

American College of Physicians
The ACP is the nation’s largest medical specialty organization. Its mission is to enhance the quality and effectiveness of health care by fostering excellence and professionalism in the practice of medicine.
www.doctorsforadults.com
800-523-1546, x2600

American Chronic Pain Association
The ACPA provides support for those suffering with chronic pain through education and self-help group activities.
www.theacpa.org
800-533-3231

American Pain Foundation
The mission of the American Pain Foundation is to improve patient quality of life by providing practical information, raising public awareness and understanding of pain, and advocating against barriers to effective treatment.
www.painfoundation.org
888-615-PAIN (7246)

The National Pain Foundation
The National Pain Foundation is an online education and support community for pain patients and their families.
www.painconnection.org

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In the pharmaceutical area, Alpharma Pharmaceuticals LLC has a growing franchise in the acute and chronic pain market with NSAIDs and opioids. Alpharma Animal Health is internationally recognized as a leading provider of pharmaceutical products for poultry and livestock through its animal-health division. Alpharma Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients is among the world’s leading producers of specialty pharmaceutical-grade bulk antibiotics.

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American Academy of Pain Medicine

The American Academy of Pain Medicine (AAPM) is the medical specialty society representing physicians practicing in the field of Pain Medicine. As a medical specialty society, the Academy is involved in education, training, advocacy, and research in the specialty of Pain Medicine.

The practice of Pain Medicine is comprehensive and multi-disciplinary in approach, incorporating modalities from various specialties to ensure the comprehensive evaluation and treatment of the pain patient. AAPM represents the diverse scope of the field through membership from a variety of origins, including such specialties as anesthesiology, internal medicine, neurology, neurological surgery, orthopedic surgery, psychiatry, and psychiatry.

American College of Physicians (ACP)

Established in 1915, the American College of Physicians (ACP) is the nation’s largest medical specialty organization and second largest physician group. Its mission is to enhance the quality and effectiveness of health care by fostering excellence and professionalism in the practice of medicine. ACP membership includes about 119,000 members including medical students. Members are physicians in general internal medicine and related subspecialties, including cardiology, gastroenterology, nephrology, endocrinology, hematology, rheumatology, neurology, pulmonary disease, oncology, infectious diseases, allergy and immunology, and geriatrics. Internists treat the majority of adults in the United States.
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Today most chronic pain can be managed. You can return to doing the things you did before the pain began. This guidebook and DVD will help you:

- **Be educated** about your pain and possible treatments
- **Be responsible** about your use of prescription medications
- **Be confident** that you can find relief and return to the life you knew

“Pain can really get you down mentally. Know that there are so many things that can be done these days—so many ways to make it better!”