Living Well with Chronic Pain
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Chronic pain is a condition that affects your whole life. Work, play, and even relationships can suffer. But, most chronic pain can be managed and you can live a full and meaningful life. Chronic pain affects millions of people every day. You are not alone.

This booklet will help you learn about your options for treatment and lifestyle changes that can help you live well with chronic pain.
Chronic Pain and You

Sometimes it can be hard for healthcare professionals to find the cause of your pain, but that doesn’t mean your pain isn’t real. The cause of your pain may be clear, or it may be hard to find. Pain can be very complex.

Chronic pain can feel overwhelming and frustrating. It can make you feel like you will never be “back to normal” or like you will never find something that helps you feel better. The good news is there are many ways to manage your pain. You can embrace your life and live well, even with chronic pain! This booklet and your healthcare professional team will help you find ways to do just that.
What is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain is any type of lasting pain in your body. It can last for months or years, and can range from mild to severe. Everyone’s experience of pain is different.

Chronic pain is also emotional. How you feel pain can be affected by your:

- Health history
- Attitudes
- Beliefs
- Personality
- Emotions
- Lifestyle
- Family history
- Gender
What Does Chronic Pain Feel Like?

Chronic pain can feel different for everyone. Even if you have the same pain condition as someone else, the way you feel or experience the pain can be very different. Chronic pain can:

- Be mild to severe pain that does not go away
- Be pain that feels sharp, shooting, dull, constant, off-and-on, or burning
- Feel like parts of your body are sore, tight, or stiff
- Make it hard to move the painful area
- Feel like you have less strength in the painful area
- Make you more tired than usual

These feelings can cause changes in sleep and appetite. Chronic pain may not only be physical. It may also affect your emotions. Pain can affect your day-to-day life, and it can feel like it will never end. It can affect how you do your favorite things, and may even prevent you from doing them altogether. This can make many people feel:

- Sad
- Hopeless
- Fearful
- Anxious
- Angry

These feelings are normal and understandable.
Managing Your Chronic Pain

- There are many ways that you can manage your pain. Many people find they can get back to doing the things they like to do when they learn ways to manage their pain.
- You may never be without pain, but you can find ways to cope with it and get back to doing the things you used to. Don't give up!
- The next few pages will help offer strategies and ideas for managing your pain on a day-to-day basis.
- Talk with your healthcare professional about coming up with a plan that is best for you and your needs.
Changes in Chronic Pain

The way you feel pain can change from day to day. Some days you may feel very little pain. Some days you may feel worse. This is normal. Learning about your pain and what activities make it feel better or worse can help you feel more in control of your pain and even your mood. Keeping a pain diary can help you track what activities make you feel good or bad. See the sample pain diary on the next page to learn how to keep track of your pain levels, your activities, what helped, and what hurt.
Managing Your Pain

Using a Pain Diary

A pain diary can help you track your levels of pain each day. You can also write what you did that helped your pain or made it worse. It can be helpful to write down what medicines you took (if any). After a while, this diary can help you see patterns in your pain levels and what makes your pain better. Below is a sample pain diary. Use the blank diary on the next page to track your pain.

Sample Pain Diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Pain Level</th>
<th>What I did Today</th>
<th>Hours of Sleep</th>
<th>What Helped</th>
<th>What Hurt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Went to store, cooked dinner for friend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carrying bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MON</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Went to my desk job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ibuprofen, heating pad</td>
<td>Getting out of car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Watched tv, tried to stretch but pain was too bad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ibuprofen and pain cream but still had pain. Made it hard to sleep.</td>
<td>Any movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# My Pain Diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Pain Level</th>
<th>What I did Today</th>
<th>Hours of Sleep</th>
<th>What Helped</th>
<th>What Hurt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUN</td>
<td></td>
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<td>MON</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUE</td>
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<td>WED</td>
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<tr>
<td>THU</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRI</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily Life with Pain

Living with chronic pain can be hard, but there are a number of things you can do in your everyday life to bring you some relief. If you have chronic pain, it can be helpful to make some changes in your life. These include:

1. Setting goals to increase your activity and help you get back to doing the things you like to do.
2. Making lifestyle changes that help you focus on your health and happiness.
3. Creating a pain toolkit so that you have an idea of what to do when your pain feels overwhelming.
4. Working with your healthcare professional to come up with a treatment plan that works for you.

Setting Goals

It can be helpful to set goals to help you get back to doing the things you like to do. This can mean increasing your activity, getting back to work, or doing your hobbies again.

It’s important to move toward your goals slowly and safely. It can take time to start to feel better, and relief might not come right away. You might need to change how you do certain things. For example, if you love to cook, you might need to take more breaks or wear supportive shoes in the kitchen. Do what works for you! If you keep at it, you can meet your goals and learn how to manage your pain.
Setting Goals

When you live with chronic pain, setting goals may feel impossible. Some days, it might be hard to get out of bed or to walk, let alone do things you enjoy doing. While having no pain at all might not be possible, setting small goals can help you feel better and get back in control of your life. They can improve the quality of your life, which may make you feel better overall. Work with your healthcare professional team to safely set goals.

It’s important to set goals that are realistic for you. This means setting goals that you can achieve in a certain amount of time and that you can actually do. For example, some goals might be:

- Walk around the block twice per week
- Cook dinner once per week
- Do stretching exercises three times per week

Use the goal setting worksheet on the next page to write down your goals.
My Goals

Things I want to do now (short-term):

☐ Walk around the block one time once per week.
☐ Be able to make my bed each morning.
☐
☐
☐
☐

Things I want to do in a few weeks or months:

☐ Go to a 1-hour painting class once per week.
☐ Watch my grandchild once per month.
☐
☐
☐
☐

Things I want to do in a few months or years (long-term):

☐ Walk on the nature path by my house for 30 minutes.
☐ Go on a road trip with my family to the beach for a week.
☐
☐
☐
☐

It can be helpful to look back on this page and track your progress. Some people hang it up on their refrigerator or at their desk to keep their goals in mind.
Lifestyle Changes

There are other things you can do to feel better. These include:

- **Quitting smoking.** Even though smoking feels good in the moment, it can make your pain worse in the long term. People who smoke usually feel worse pain than people who don’t. Smoking is also bad for your health in many other ways. Ask your healthcare professional for advice on how to quit smoking.

- **Exercising.** Pain can make it hard to exercise, but it will help in the long run. Start with small changes. Walking, yoga, or stretching can help your mood and your pain levels. It can also help you sleep at night. Ask your doctor about what exercise is safe for you to do.
Managing Your Pain

- **Sleeping well.** Even though pain can make it hard to sleep, getting enough sleep can help you feel better. Create bedtime habits like stretching, taking a warm bath, or doing something else that you find relaxing to ease you into sleep. It’s best to not look at screens like your computer, cell phone, TV, or tablet before bed. If it is hard for you to sleep, ask your healthcare professional for advice.

- **Eating well.** Eating a balanced diet is important for your health. It can also help with your energy levels. Try to eat:
  - Lean proteins, like chicken, fish, or tofu
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Whole grains, like oatmeal or whole wheat bread

- **Reducing stress.** Feeling stressed and anxious can make your pain worse. Try to make time for yourself throughout your day by doing something you enjoy. It might also help to talk to friends, family, or a therapist if you feel stressed out. Some people do yoga or meditate.
Treatments Without Medicine

It’s important for your health professional to review your health history and do a physical exam before creating a treatment plan with you. There are many options available to help you manage your chronic pain that don’t include taking medicines. Your health professional may want to try these options first before offering medicines. Some options may include:

- **Heat therapy.** Many people find it helpful to take hot baths, showers, or use electric heating pads.

- **Cold therapy.** Some people find that applying cold to a painful area during a flare-up is helpful. Cold can calm down inflammation that makes your pain feel worse. Putting ice packs on a painful area can help.

- **Massage.** Massage therapy may help relieve some of your pain and help you feel relaxed.

- **Acupuncture.** During acupuncture, very small needles are placed on specific points of your body. This can trigger a response that lowers your pain levels.

- **Spinal manipulation.** This is most often done by a chiropractor. The chiropractor will readjust your spine, which may help with your pain.

- **Physical therapy.** A physical therapist teaches you certain movements or stretches that may help your pain. You may need to have more than one visit to feel better.
• **Talk therapy.** Chronic pain is a very emotional experience. People can feel sad, angry, nervous, and hopeless. A therapist can teach you strategies to help you in your day-to-day life, as well as teach you ways that you can manage your pain. Talk therapy can be done one-on-one in person or in groups. It can also be done over the phone or online.

• **Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is similar to meditation. It can help you learn to accept your pain instead of fight against it. It can be as simple as sitting in a quiet room and breathing calmly for a few minutes each day to relax.

• **Pacing.** Pacing simply means doing your day-to-day activities a little differently. Because you have chronic pain, you might need to take things more slowly, take more breaks, or rest more during your activities.

• **Biofeedback.** Biofeedback helps you learn to control feelings of stress. It teaches you how to relax tense muscles, lower your heart rate, and your blood pressure. Sometimes you will be hooked up to a monitor that checks your heart rate, brain waves, or other parts of your body. Ask your doctor for more information about biofeedback.
Medicines

There are many medicines available that can reduce your pain levels. It’s best to try medicines only after you have first tried non-medicine treatments. Some medicines are available over-the-counter at your local pharmacy. Others come with a prescription.

Your healthcare professional will recommend a medicine based on what symptoms you have. Certain types of medicines are used for certain symptoms and pain levels. These will be different for everybody.

Some types of medicines available over-the-counter are:

- Analgesics, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol ©)
- NSAIDS, such as ibuprofen (Motrin ©), aspirin (Bayer ©), or naproxen (Aleve ©)
- Skin patches and creams, like Bengay (©) and Aspercreme (©)

Medicines can have side effects, even over-the-counter medicines. Ask your healthcare professional:

- Which over-the-counter medicines are right for me?
- How much should I take?
- Are there any side effects?
- Can I take this with other medicines?
Medicines that come with a prescription can include:

- Prescription pain relievers, such as lotions or creams you put on the skin
- Prescription NSAIDS, like Celebrex ©
- Antidepressants, which can help you feel less pain
- Anti-convulsants, which work to help nerve pain
- Muscle relaxants, which help your muscles feel relaxed

You can use the medicine tracker on page 30 to help you keep track of your medicines.

⚠️ These medicines may have side effects. Talk with your healthcare professional about how to stay safe when taking these medicines.
Other Treatments

There are also other treatments available for your pain. These might include:

- **Injections.** Injections for pain can include:
  - Steroid injections. Your healthcare professional puts a small injection with steroids into the painful area. This can help reduce inflammation and lower your pain levels.
  - Nerve blocks. These are injections that help block the pain that your body feels. There are a few different types of nerve blocks. Ask your healthcare professional whether this is an option for you.

- **Low level laser therapy (LLLT).** LLLT uses a special type of light that is put on the painful area. This light might help reduce your pain levels.

- **TENS therapy.** TENS therapy uses low voltage electrical currents to help your pain.

⚠️ It's important to note that some of these medicines and treatments may not be covered by your insurance. Ask your healthcare professional about the cost of any recommended medicines and treatments.
Choosing the Right Treatment for You

Your healthcare professional will conduct a full exam before working with you to create a treatment plan. This is so they can help you choose treatments that are right for your pain. This exam should include:

- A health history
- Questions about your pain and how it affects you
- A physical exam

There are many things to consider when you are choosing a treatment for chronic pain. Some people might need to use a few different types of treatment in order to find what works best for them. Using a few of these options together might help you feel better than using a single one alone. Talk with your healthcare professional about how to make the best decision for you. Some factors to consider are:

- How the treatment will affect your daily activities, like driving or working
- How much the treatment costs
- How convenient the treatment is, and how it fits into your life
- Whether you have access to that type of treatment
- The side effects of the treatment
What are opioids?

You may have been prescribed opioids for chronic pain in the past. Doctors no longer recommend using opioids for chronic pain. Opioids are a type of medicine that can help reduce very severe pain. They work by changing the way your brain responds to pain which helps your body feel less pain. Opioids are only useful for certain types of pain, which include:

- Pain after a surgery or injury
- Certain types of cancer pain
- Pain at the end of life

Opioids are strong medicines that can have side effects. These can include:

- Trouble having a bowel movement (constipation)
- Feeling confused
- Feeling sleepy or drowsy
- Feeling itchy
- Sweating
- Feeling sick or vomiting
- Worsening of pain

Tell your healthcare professional if you have any of these side effects while using opioid medicines.

⚠️ If you are taking opioids, you may want to think about weaning off of them. Weaning means slowly taking less opioids until you aren't taking them at all. Ask your health professional how you can do this safely. Do not try to wean off of opioids on your own. This can be dangerous and can cause withdrawal symptoms.
Risks of Opioids

If your healthcare professional does prescribe opioids, there are risks to taking the medicines you should know about. Some serious risks of using opioids include:

- **Breathing problems.** Opioids can slow your breathing down or even stop it. This can be very dangerous.
- **Increased pain.** Sometimes opioid medicines make your pain worse.
- **Tolerance.** Tolerance means that you will need more medicine to get the same relief. Taking more medicine can raise your risk for side effects. Tolerance is not the same as addiction. If you feel that your medicine is no longer helping your pain, do not take extra. Call your doctor for advice.
- **Addiction.** Opioids are very addictive. Addiction means that the urge to take your medicine becomes very strong and out of your control. It’s important to use these medicines only as your doctor tells you to.
Risks of Opioids (continued)

- **Withdrawal.** After taking opioids, even for a short while, your body gets used to the medicine. When you take less or stop taking opioids, you can have symptoms such as poor sleep, anxiety, feeling sick or vomiting, and diarrhea. You should never take less or stop taking your medicines unless your healthcare professional tells you how to do so safely. You can decide to go off of your opioid medicines slowly. This can be done safely and comfortably. You must be under the care of a doctor to do so.

- **Interactions with other medicines.** Opioids can interact with your other medicines. These can make the risks even greater. It is very important to avoid taking opioids if you take sedatives such as benzodiazepines, such as Xanax ® or Ativan ®. You should not drink alcohol while taking opioids.

- **Impact on your day-to-day activities.** Opioid medicines can make you feel very drowsy and confused. It is not safe for you to drive while you are taking opioids. It may not be safe for you to do some of your other daily activities, either.

Work with your health professional team to be sure you are using your medicines safely. Ask if weaning off of opioids is right for you. This might mean that you have to give urine samples or sign a agreement. This doesn’t mean that you have done anything wrong or are a bad person. It’s a way that your healthcare professional can help keep you safe.
It may take a long time to begin feeling relief from chronic pain. Pain can affect many areas of your life. You may see a few healthcare professionals over time who can help you with your pain, such as:

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Pain specialists
- Physical therapists
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Pharmacists

These healthcare professionals are there to help you and give you support when you need it. The other important members of your care team are:

- Your family and friends
- You!
It’s important that you are honest with your healthcare team about the pain you feel. It is also important that you let your healthcare team know if your pain gets worse. Make sure to tell all of your team members what medicines you are taking, or if you start needing to take more medicines than usual.

Your healthcare professionals want you to be safe. Be honest about your health history with your care team. That includes letting them know if you have a history of alcohol or substance use.
Getting Support

Having chronic pain can make you and your family and friends who support you feel alone. Your healthcare team is there to provide support and help. Coping with chronic pain is hard. It may help to speak with others who are going through something similar. You are not alone! Many online communities can connect you with other people who have pain. By sharing your story, or hearing other patient’s stories, you may feel less alone. Online support groups also help patients connect and learn from each other. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

The American Chronic Pain Association:
https://www.theacpa.org

The Pain Connection:
http://painconnection.org

The National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association:
https://www.fmcpaware.org

There may be support groups that meet in person. Ask your health care professional if there are any local groups you can attend.
Now that you’ve learned about managing your chronic pain, you can create a toolkit to help you manage your pain. This is a list of activities or things that help you feel better. This way, you can look into your pain “toolkit” for ideas the next time you have pain.

A pain toolkit can also help you have a plan in place for when your pain gets worse or becomes overwhelming. The toolkit can include taking medicines, but it will also give you ideas of things to do besides taking medicines.

Below are examples of activities for your pain toolkit:

- Gently stretch the muscle or area of my body that hurts
- Take a hot bath
- Call a family member or friend to take my mind off the pain
- Go for a walk
- Do a crossword puzzle
- Call my doctor if the pain gets too bad
My Pain Toolkit

Use the spaces below to come up with tools for your own toolkit. Discuss these with your health professional to see if these are safe for you and if they have any other ideas.

☐ I will do ________________________________ when my pain gets bad.

☐ I will call ______________________________ when I feel overwhelmed.

☐ ______________________________

☐ ______________________________

☐ ______________________________

☐ ______________________________

☐ ______________________________

☐ ______________________________

Important phone numbers:

Doctor/Clinic: ________________________________

Pharmacist: ________________________________
Moving Ahead With Chronic Pain

This guide gives you a number of tools that you can use to live with chronic pain. Now it’s your turn to take action! Fill out your pain toolkit on page 28 so that the next time you have a flare-up, you have ways of managing it. If you need extra support, you can always contact your health care professional, family, friends, or the groups on page 26 for help. You can do it!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Medicine:</th>
<th>Example: Ibuprofen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dosage Size, Shape, &amp; Color</td>
<td>400mg Small, oval, peach color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Much</td>
<td>2 pills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Take/How to Use</td>
<td>Take by mouth, when pain gets bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start/Stop Date</td>
<td>4/1/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Take with food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I Use It For</td>
<td>Back pain</td>
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</table>
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