

Chronic Pain



What Is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain is any type of lasting pain in your body. This pain can be caused by an injury, illness, or other health problem. Sometimes there is no clear reason for the pain. You can feel chronic pain in many parts of the body and for many different reasons.

Chronic pain can last for months or years and can range from mild to severe. It can be a constant feeling, or it can come and go. Having chronic pain can affect your day-to-day life and make it hard for you to do the things you want to do.



What Are the Symptoms of Chronic Pain?

The symptoms of chronic pain can be different for different people. Many people have physical pain as well as emotional symptoms. The physical symptoms can be:

- Mild to severe pain that does not go away
- Pain that feels sharp, shooting, dull, constant, off-and-on, burning, aching, or electrical
- Feeling sore, tight, or stiff
- Trouble moving the painful area
- Less strength in the painful area
- Feeling tired
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite

Because chronic pain can affect your day-to-day life, it can also cause emotional symptoms. These can include:

- Changes in mood, such as feeling depressed, hopeless, fearful, anxious, or stressed
- Less interest in activities you used to enjoy



How is Chronic Pain Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask you questions about your medical history and current symptoms and will examine you.
- Your doctor will need to rule out causes for your pain, such as illness or injury. You may have a blood test or imaging tests like an MRI, X-ray, or CT scan. Other tests may be done to see if you have nerve damage or muscle weakness.
- Depending on what type of pain you have, your doctor may refer you to a specialist.



How is Chronic Pain Treated?

There are many treatments available to help your chronic pain. These include medicines and other therapies. Sometimes, it can take a few treatments to get relief. Medicines that may treat your pain include:

- Over-the-counter pain medicines like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®)
- Muscle relaxers
- Antidepressant medicines
- Pain relief creams
- Opioid medicines. These medicines are very powerful and can be addictive. They may not work for all types of pain, or for your pain level. Work with your doctor to stay safe if using these medicines.

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Some people find that medicine alone is not enough to help their pain. Other treatment options may include:

- Physical therapy
- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Relaxation techniques
- Yoga



How Can I Manage My Chronic Pain?

It can be overwhelming to have chronic pain. Many people feel angry, frustrated, and sad. It's important to focus on your emotional well-being if you have chronic pain. Below are some tips to help you cope with your pain.

- Try to lower your stress levels. Stress can make your pain worse.
- Pace yourself. Rest when you need to and get plenty of sleep.
- Think positively and try to focus on how you are getting better.
- Try to find a hobby or pastime that you can do comfortably.
- Find a support group, either in person or online.
- Talk to a therapist. They can help you learn the skills to cope with your pain.
- Keep a pain journal. Track how your pain feels after certain treatments or activities. This can help you avoid doing things that make your pain worse. It can also help you identify what gives you relief.



Questions For My Doctor

- What is causing my pain? Why won't it go away?
- What is the best treatment option for me? Will I need more than one treatment?
- What happens if the treatments don't work?
- Are there any activities I should avoid?
- Is it safe for me to exercise?
- What if my pain gets worse?

For More Information

- **Medline Plus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/spring11/articles/spring11pg5-6.html
- **American Chronic Pain Association:** <https://theacpa.org/>
- **American Academy of Family Physicians:** www.aafp.org/afp/2000/0301/p1345.html

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