

About chronic pain

- Chronic pain is pain that lasts for more than about three months. It may be mild. Or it may be severe. It may come from a past injury or be linked to a health condition. Or it may have no known cause.
- Common types of chronic pain include:
 - Muscle pain (Examples: back pain, fibromyalgia)
 - Headaches (Examples: chronic sinus pain, migraines)
 - Bone pain (Examples: arthritis, osteoporosis)
 - Nerve pain (Examples: sciatica, neuropathy, shingles, carpal tunnel syndrome)
- Chronic pain often causes anxiety, stress, anger, and depression. This can make the pain worse. A vicious cycle can result.
- Chronic pain lessens the body's natural painkillers. It also makes it harder for the body to fight infection and disease.
- Chronic pain may keep you from sleeping, going to work or school, or doing daily tasks.
- Treating chronic pain is complex. Your doctor may refer you to a pain specialist.

Pain medicines

Pain medicines can help ease chronic pain. In many cases they are needed.

Acetaminophen. Your doctor may recommend acetaminophen (Tylenol). Keep in mind that many other pain medicines contain acetaminophen. If you're not careful, you might take more than is safe. Taking too much can cause liver damage, especially if you drink alcohol. If you find you need more than two acetaminophen pills a day, tell your doctor.

NSAIDs. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are also used to treat pain.

Examples include:

- Aspirin
- Ibuprofen (brand names Motrin and Advil)
- Naproxen (brand name Aleve)
- Prescription-strength NSAIDs

Your doctor may recommend that you take NSAIDs only when you need them or every day. Follow your doctor's advice.

NSAIDs may have serious side effects. Always take them with food or milk because they can cause stomach bruising or bleeding. When taken for a long time, they can cause kidney damage. They can also make blood pressure worse.

Don't take NSAIDs with other medicines without talking to your doctor first.

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Managing Chronic Pain: Medication Concerns and Lifestyle Tips

Opioids. For many people, opioids are an important part of treating chronic pain.

Examples include:

- Morphine
- Oxycodone
- Hydrocodone
- Hydromorphone
- Methadone
- Fentanyl

If your doctor wants you to take an opioid, follow his or her directions carefully. **Note:**

- You may have nausea and vomiting at first. Your doctor may suggest medicine for this. You may also feel dizzy and sleepy. If so, don't drive or operate machinery.
- Constipation is a common side effect. Drink at least eight glasses of water every day. Eat 2-4 servings of fruit and 3-5 servings of vegetables every day. Eat whole grains such as whole wheat bread and brown rice. Your doctor may suggest a laxative.
- Opioids can cause physical dependence. That is, the body can get used to the drug and need it to work properly, even after the drug isn't needed for pain. If this happens, your doctor can help you slowly and safely lower the dose to wean you off the medicine.
- Opioids can be addictive. About 5 out of 100 people who take opioids for pain as directed over the period of a year become addicted. Your doctor will carefully monitor your use of these drugs. Addiction can be treated but prevention is best.
- An overdose of opioids can stop breathing and be deadly. Take them only as directed. Never take them with alcohol or tranquilizers. Do not take them with other medicines without your doctor's okay.

Other medicines. Some drugs used to treat other illnesses can treat pain. Examples are some medicines for depression and seizures.

Anticonvulsants are used to prevent seizures, but they can also help with nerve pain. Examples of anticonvulsants are Gabitril, Tegretol, Neurontin, and Topamax.

Antidepressants in low doses can reduce pain, particularly nerve pain and fibromyalgia. Cymbalta is an antidepressant approved for musculoskeletal pain. Examples of antidepressants that can reduce pain are Pamelor, Aventyl, Desyrel, Elavil, and Serzone. Antidepressants are powerful drugs that can have serious side effects.

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Other ways to ease chronic pain

Electrical stimulation and nerve blocks are sometimes used to treat chronic pain. So is surgery.

Less invasive treatments can help too. Many have been shown to change the chemicals in the body that cause pain. These treatments may help you avoid pain medicines. Or you may be able to take a lower dose. Examples include:

- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Biofeedback
- Chiropractic adjustment
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (helps you manage your thoughts and feelings)
- Massage
- Meditation
- Moist heat
- Physical therapy, such as stretching and strengthening exercises
- Relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing
- Self-hypnosis
- Tai Chi
- Qigong
- Yoga

Talk with your doctor about what might be right for you.

What if the pain doesn't go away?

- Even with the best treatment, you may still have some pain. Stay realistic. For example, aim to reduce the amount of pain you have and how often it occurs. Set a goal to be able to do more of your daily tasks than before. Chart your progress over time.
- Live a healthy lifestyle.
 - Eat healthy meals and snacks.
 - Reach and keep a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, losing even small amounts of weight can help ease joint pain.
 - Get regular sleep.
 - Be active. Pain may make it harder to be active but it is one of the best things you can do. It can help you sleep better, manage your weight, strengthen your muscles, and feel better about yourself. Work with your doctor to come up with an exercise routine that fits your abilities. Pace yourself and don't overdo it.



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- Stopping smoking can help too. The nicotine in cigarettes can make some pain medicines not work as well. Smokers tend to have more pain than nonsmokers.
- Practice ways to relax every day. Pain is worse during stress.
- Work with your doctor as a partner. Take an active part in solving problems and making decisions about your treatment.
- Talking with a counselor may help you accept the fact of pain in your life and cope with your feelings. Focus on what you *can* do, not on what you *can't* do. Learn to look beyond your pain and see the things that are important in your life. You may still have pain, but with a positive attitude, you can learn to manage it well.



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