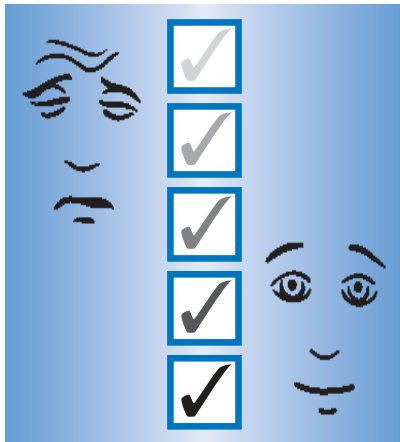


PAIN MANAGEMENT



what you can do



The main types of pain

Acute pain lasts for a short time. When the cause is treated the pain goes away.

Pain is called **chronic** when it does not go away and you have experienced pain on most days of the week for at least three months. Tests may not find an explanation for the pain. This does not mean that chronic pain is not real. The nervous system, which sends pain signals, may have become disturbed. The pain itself, however it began, has become the problem.

What you can do

Medicine can cure many conditions, but it may not be able to completely ease your chronic pain. However, with proper management and your help, most chronic pain can be relieved to a tolerable level.

People who take responsibility for the management of their pain can lead a normal life. Chronic pain can cause physical problems and emotional distress such as anger, frustration or a feeling of helplessness. A negative attitude can increase your pain. However, you can learn to focus on your abilities, your positive qualities and ways that allow you to regain control of your life – in spite of the pain. Managing pain is ongoing; every day and step by step. The path back to a satisfying life may not be straight but by learning to ask for and accept help and advice, you can do it.

Pain Management Clinics have specialist doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists to help people learn to manage their pain and regain a worthwhile lifestyle. Discuss with your GP whether a referral to one of these clinics or to a specialist pain management doctor would be beneficial.

How to design a personal pain management plan

Here are some tips on things you and your doctor can discuss:

1. Find out about your condition.

- Ask your doctor about any questions or concerns that you may have. Remember you have a right to ask questions and expect answers that you can understand. Doctors sometimes don't provide information or address concerns as they may assume you already know the information.
- Check out other reliable forms of information such as books, internet, pharmacist, nurse or other health professional, support organizations.

2. Keep a pain diary to identify what makes your condition worse or what helps it.

- For example, you can keep a list of when (which day, date and time) the pain begins, how long it lasts, how strong it is, what medicines you take, what medicines work, what situations or other triggers (eg. certain activities) seem to make the pain worse or better.

3. Design a personal management plan with your doctor or other health professionals for a realistic way of managing your pain.

- Include activities, exercise, relaxation training, a medication schedule and a plan for flare-ups that may happen after hours. Injections such as pethidine should not be necessary for treating flare-ups of chronic pain.
- This plan should be reviewed at regular intervals.
- Carry this plan with you.
- Don't just put up with pain.

4. Set up a support network for when you need help.

- This can include family, friends or fellow sufferers.
- Find out what community resources are available to you.

5. Learn coping skills that help you manage your pain.

For example:

- Pace your activity so you don't get over-tired.
- Set priorities so the most important things get done first.
- Communicate with your family, friends and doctors so you don't isolate yourself.
- Learn techniques of relaxation and distraction to overcome the pain. An occupational therapist could teach you these simple skills.

6. Exercise for fun and fitness.

- Consult your doctor for advice on appropriate exercise.
- Inactivity contributes to weakness, fatigue and sleeplessness. Being overweight puts extra stress on the body. A physiotherapist could help with suggestions for exercise options.
- Discomfort or pain through exercise may not necessarily be harmful.

7. Ensure regular sleep and rest patterns.

If you have a problem sleeping:

- Have a regular time for getting up in the morning.
- Avoid tea, coffee and alcohol later in the day.
- Daytime napping can upset your sleep pattern.
- Get some fresh air and sunlight during the day.
- A hot bath before bed is helpful.
- Don't regularly use medications to help you sleep.
- Check with your doctor about timing your pain medication.

8. Benefit from a healthy diet.

- Drink 8 glasses of water a day
- Eat a balanced diet from the five food groups. (A dietician could advise on this.)

9. Recognize and manage your emotional changes.

- Sometimes pain can leave you feeling tired, frustrated, depressed, worried, angry or just generally in a bad mood. This can make the pain seem worse.
- Think in a positive way so the negative thoughts don't take over.
- Help from a counsellor or a psychologist could be of assistance.

10. Reward yourself!

- Living with pain is difficult. Give yourself credit for each positive step you take.

What you need to know about medication

Ideally, you will be able to learn coping skills like relaxation and distraction to help with the pain, but people with chronic conditions often need to use some medication.

1. Find out about your medicines.

- Whether there are side effects of medicines, if there are any special requirements (eg. to be taken with food, how often, etc.), if the medicines can affect driving and whether they can cause dependence if used unwisely. Make sure you know when and how much medication can be used.

2. Keep an updated list of all your medications.

- Keep a copy of this list with you and show it to your doctor/s when your medication changes.
- Include any over-the-counter medicines or natural supplements or remedies. Check with your pharmacist about whether medications interact with other medicines you are taking or with certain foods.
- It is a good idea to go to one pharmacy. Ask the pharmacist to record all your medications on your medication list.
- Ask what any new drug is for and if there are any special requirements in taking it.

3. Work closely with your doctor to tailor a medication program that controls your pain to a tolerable level.

- Report side effects, follow instructions carefully, and be patient until you find the right medicine for you.
- Sometimes it is best to take a pain reliever around the clock to take the edge off the pain, rather than waiting until the pain becomes overwhelming.
- Unsupervised increase of medication can lead to greater problems in the long term.
- Unless the medication is helping you to function and get on with your life, you should stop it, slowly, under doctor's instruction.

4. Never try anyone else's medicine or give them yours: it can be dangerous.

5. Ask for a Consumer Medicines Information leaflet for each medicine: These explain about the medicine in plain English. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for these leaflets.

6. If you go to hospital: Take your medication list with you. When you leave, ask for an explanation about any medications that you are given and what you should do when you go home. Doctors sometimes believe that people understand more than they really do about their continuing treatment and follow-up.



Remember: it's up to you

If you are actively involved in your health care you will get better results. So:

- ✓ **Speak up about your concerns**
- ✓ **Learn about your condition**
- ✓ **Understand your medicines**
- ✓ **Keep active**
- ✓ **Learn to relax and self-manage**
- ✓ **Stay positive**



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THERAPEUTIC
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GROUP

This pamphlet has been prepared by the NSW Therapeutic Assessment Group Inc to accompany the prescribing guidelines for chronic or recurrent non-malignant pain, prepared with a grant from NSW Health

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Working as a Team