

Tips for people who suffer chronic pain

Good Management of Chronic Pain

Pain is described as chronic when it lasts for more than 3 months, despite appropriate investigations and treatment.

If your doctor has told you that you have chronic pain and that you will have to learn to live with it, what should you do? The best evidence available at present is that you should do the following things:-

1. Come to terms with it.

No one wants to live with chronic pain. But some pain problems have no cure at present. Accepting that the pain you have is chronic and has no 'quick fix' is the first step to living with it.

2. Reassure yourself.

Finding out why your pain is going on and on may help, but your doctor may not be able to give you a full explanation. S/he should be able to reassure you that there is nothing seriously wrong with your body. In your case, when pain gets worse it is unlikely to be due to more damage. Increased pain may be due to the long-term effects of inactivity and increased sensitivity in your nervous system, so that previously normal activities are now able to stir up your pain.

3. Stop seeking more treatment!

This risks making things worse, keeps the focus on the pain and raises unrealistic hopes. Patients often tell us that each time a new treatment fails they are left feeling a little more helpless. A better use of your time and energy would be finding things that you could do to improve the quality of your life. Seeing your doctor every couple of months will often be enough for him/her to keep your progress under review and to reassure you.

4. Use as little medication as possible.

'Pain killers' may take the edge off the pain but they will not cure it. Many people don't like the side-effects of medication either. Expecting medication to solve the problems of chronic pain is unrealistic. If medication is not helping then it is better to take none. If 'pain killers' do help, then taking as few as necessary on a regular basis rather than 'as needed' is recommended. A medication plan should be discussed with and monitored regularly by your doctor.

5. Learn ways to lead a normal life despite pain.

Avoidance of activities you expect will worsen your pain can result in a very restricted life. It is likely you will have some limits, but letting pain determine what you do risks allowing pain to run your life. You may need to do things a little differently, like take short breaks and take longer to do things. You can regain many normal activities or find new ones by taking a step-by-step approach. Make realistic goals and develop a plan to work towards them. Your goals should be things you want to achieve. It can also help if you focus on things you can do and not on what you can't. Best of all, find a job you can do.

6. Keep as fit as possible.

You are not training for the Olympics but if you lead as healthy a lifestyle as possible, your pain will be less of a problem. This means getting regular exercise, good sleep, eating a balanced diet, and finding a balance between work and leisure activities.

7. Deal with depression.

Feeling depressed makes living with pain that much harder. Seeking help from a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist may be useful. Medication is often not needed; talking things over and learning better ways of dealing with your pain and other difficulties is often more effective.

You may benefit from a programme such as **ADAPT**

How can **ADAPT** help?

If you feel that your are already doing all these things and you are happy with your progress, then you may not need **ADAPT**. But if you would like to do better than you are at present then **ADAPT** may help. **ADAPT** may also help if pain is interfering with your attempts to return to work or to stay at work. **ADAPT** can help you to regain control over your life and to achieve your goals despite pain.