

Chronic pain tip sheet

What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain, sometimes called persistent pain, is pain that continues beyond the usual healing time after an injury or illness, generally more than 3 to 6 months. It is common and complex, and everyone experiences it differently. Research shows the nerves and brain can become more sensitive, so pain signals may continue even after tissues have healed. Many people find that more than one approach helps.

Common signs

Chronic pain can affect many parts of everyday life. People may notice:

- Pain on most days, from mild to severe
- Finding it hard to work or be active
- Poor sleep or feeling tired
- Pulling back from social activities
- Low mood, worry or frustration
- A cycle of overdoing it, then paying for it

Things that may help

Many people find a mix of approaches helpful. These ideas may sit alongside the support of a GP and health team.

Pacing

On good days it can be tempting to do a lot, which may lead to more pain and fatigue afterwards (the boom and bust cycle). Some people find breaking tasks into smaller parts and building up gradually helps.

Gentle movement

Many people find regular, gentle activity such as walking, swimming, cycling or tai chi helpful. A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can help with finding what suits you.

Relaxing body and mind

Relaxation and meditation may help ease tension and stress, which can make pain feel worse.

Sleep

Pain and poor sleep often feed each other. A regular sleep routine and winding down before bed may help.

Staying connected

Keeping in touch with family, friends and activities that matter can support wellbeing, even if things are done a little differently.

Questions about medicines

Medicines are often only one part of managing chronic pain. A doctor or pharmacist can talk with you about options and any questions.

Things that may help (continued)

Eating well

A balanced diet can support overall health and energy.

What matters to you

Living with chronic pain is not only about reducing pain. Many people find it helpful to set small, realistic goals around the things that matter to them.

When to get more support

If things are becoming unmanageable and affecting your social, family, work or study life, you may want to see your GP or a psychologist. You do not need to wait until things feel serious to reach out.

A GP can be a good place to start. They can talk with you about a pain management plan and other health professionals who may help, such as a physiotherapist, exercise physiologist or psychologist. Psychological therapies such as CBT and mindfulness are among the approaches used to help people manage the impact of pain.

Benefits of seeking support

- Talking with a GP or psychologist may help you make sense of what is happening.
- Support might help you feel less alone with what you are going through.
- A psychologist could offer new ways of coping that suit you.
- Support might help you focus on the things that matter to you while living with pain.

Need help right now?

If you or someone else is in danger or thinking about suicide, please reach out now.

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Emergency services, if life is in danger

13 11 14

Lifeline crisis support, 24 hours, 7 days

13 92 76

13YARN, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7

Trusted Australian resources

Painaustralia pinaustralia.org.au

healthdirect healthdirect.gov.au | 1800 022 222

This tip sheet offers general information only and does not replace advice from your GP, psychologist or other health professional.