

MANAGING CHRONIC PAIN

Pain is an all-too-familiar problem and the most common reason people see a physician. Unfortunately, alleviating pain isn't always straightforward. At least 100 million adults in the U.S. suffer from chronic pain, which affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined.



Pain serves an important purpose by alerting us to injuries such as a sprained ankle or burned hand. Chronic pain, however, is often more complex.

Although people often think of pain as a purely physical sensation, pain has biological, psychological, and emotional factors. Further, chronic pain can cause feelings such as anger, hopelessness, sadness, and anxiety. To treat pain effectively, we must address its physical, emotional, and psychological aspects.

Medical treatments, including medication, surgery, rehabilitation, and physical therapy, may be helpful for treating chronic pain. Psychological treatments are also an important part of pain management. Understanding and managing the thoughts, emotions and behaviors that accompany the discomfort can help you cope more effectively with your pain – and can reduce the intensity of your pain.

A comprehensive assessment by a psychologist skilled in helping persons with chronic pain can help identify the emotions, thoughts, fears, and stress that may be impacting your pain. Together, you can develop a plan to address your specific pain profile. The plan often involves learning relaxation strategies, challenging old beliefs about pain, building new coping skills, and addressing any anxiety or depression that may accompany your pain.



One way to do this is by helping you learn to challenge any unhelpful thoughts you have about pain and develop new ways to think about problems and find solutions. In some cases, distracting yourself from the pain is helpful. In other cases, it may be helpful to learn new ways to think about your pain.

Finding ways to stay involved in work and recreational activities and improve sleep are often the focus of psychotherapy.

Most people find that they can manage their pain better after just a few sessions. People who are dealing with accompanying depression or anxiety may benefit from a longer course of treatment. The goal is to help you develop skills to cope with your pain and live a full life.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH PAIN

These steps may be helpful in changing habits and improving sleep:



Stay Active. Pain – or the fear of pain – can lead people to stop doing the things they enjoy. It's important to not let pain take over your life.

Know your limits. Continue to be active in a way that acknowledges your physical limitations. Plan how to manage your pain and don't push yourself to do more than you can handle.

Exercise. Stay healthy with low-impact exercise, such as stretching, yoga, walking and swimming.

Stay Socially Connected. Research shows that people with greater social support are more resilient and experience less depression and anxiety. So call, text, stay in touch, and ask for help if you need it.

Distract yourself. When pain flares, find ways to distract your mind from it. Watch a movie, take a walk, engage in a hobby. Focus on a pleasant sound or experience to help you cope.



Don't lose hope. With the right kind of psychological treatments, many people learn to manage their pain and think of it in a different way.

Dr. Gordon has extensive experience helping people who are living with chronic pain. If you would like to schedule a consultation, please call (512) 496-5947 or contact us at sgordon@calmpsychoanalyst.com.

