

Chronic Pain Management

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Chronic pain is pain that persists for more than three to six months. It usually develops after a minor injury or illness. Instead of getting better over-time, the pain often increases, long after the initial injury or illness has healed. It becomes difficult to move, work and enjoy a normal life. Chronic pain sufferers often become depressed and isolated and develop a sense of frustration and helplessness. It's estimated up to 15% of Canadians suffer from chronic pain.

Causes of chronic pain

Chronic pain is different from the short lasting acute pain that occurs after an injury. Treatments that normally work for acute pain don't often work for chronic pain. That's because the pain is no longer coming from the injured area but instead from how the brain and body senses pain. In chronic pain, the body's nerves and brain rewire themselves to become supersensitive to normal things like touch and movement. This makes simple everyday tasks like getting out of bed, walking and sitting very painful. Emotional stimulus such as stress and anxiety increase the pain by producing chemicals that make the body and brain sensors even more sensitive. As yet, there is no cure, but new research shows a combination of medication management, graduated physical activity, education, and strategies to control stress can all help manage the pain.

How physiotherapists help

Effective management of chronic pain requires a team of health providers working together to:

- Help you understand chronic pain
- Help you take back control and better manage your pain
- Improve your physical function and mobility
- Get you back to a better quality of life

Physiotherapists are highly skilled at assessing how the pain affects your ability to move and will help find ways to get you moving again. Research shows physical activity is an important strategy to manage chronic pain. Physiotherapists can work with you to set up a realistic program that is safe to perform.

Your physiotherapist will:

- Help you unlearn some of the abnormal postures and movements your body may have adopted to guard the pain
- Teach you how to move again
- Develop a safe but effective exercise program
- Assess what specific treatments (e.g., manual therapy, modalities, acupuncture) will help



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