

Understanding Chronic Pain

What is Chronic Pain?

Chronic Pain is any pain that lasts more than 6 months. This type of pain usually begins as the result of some illness, injury or surgery.

Pain usually stops when healing is completed. But with chronic pain, for some reason the pain continues beyond the time it usually takes for healing to occur. This may be caused by a progressive or degenerative condition.

How is chronic pain treated?

The goal of treatment for chronic pain is to help you hurt less
do more
suffer less.

Several approaches are used to treat chronic pain.

It may not be possible to make the pain go away completely. It is possible to improve the quality of your life and help you learn to manage pain. The key to effective management of chronic pain is you.

You and your healthcare provider will decide which approach is best for you. The choices you make about lifestyle, activity level, attitude and self-care make all the difference in the quality of your life.

The approaches are:

Non-drug Therapies such as lifestyle changes, relaxation exercises, stretching, massage, hot and cold packs are the foundation of chronic pain treatment.



Medications such as acetaminophen(Tylenol™), NSAIDS(non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Motrin™) or narcotics can be used. These medications can be taken by mouth or given by injection (shot) or through an IV. These medications reduce the pain levels and reduce inflammation.

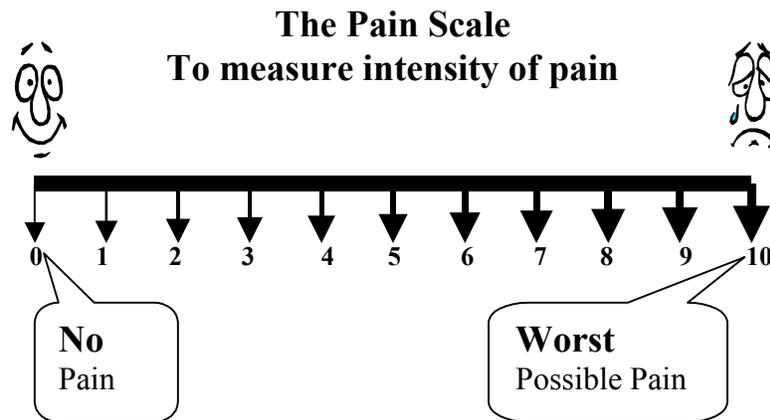
Surgery may also be needed to repair damage to the body.



How is the level of pain determined?

Your personal description of the pain is the most helpful information for your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider will want to know the details of your pain. They will ask questions about the various components of your pain.

- ☞ **Intensity** How much does it hurt? This is usually rated on a scale of zero to 10 (0 equals no pain and 10 is the worst possible pain).



- ☞ **Location** Where are you hurting?
- ☞ **Type of Pain** Does the pain burn, throb, tingle or ache? Is the pain sharp or dull?
- ☞ **What affects your pain?**- What makes your pain feel better or feel worse?
- ☞ **Duration**-How long have you had the pain?
- ☞ **Cause of the Pain** Was there an injury or an illness that caused the pain?

Chronic Pain Treatment at the Portland VA Medical Center

If you are a patient on the ward, we will talk with you about your pain. We will answer any questions you have about treatments.



If you are an outpatient, your primary care provider (PCP) is the best person to talk with about any pain you have. Your primary care provider will recommend treatment for your chronic pain. Your primary care provider may refer you to a specialty clinic if needed, such as the Chronic Pain Management Program.

Questions about Treatment of Chronic Pain

“Should I tell my provider if I feel that treatment isn’t working? I don’t want to seem like a complainer.”



Your health care provider cannot help you unless you talk about your pain. You should tell your health care provider if the treatment or the medicine does not relieve your pain, or if you are having side effects. You will eat better, sleep better and move around more easily when your pain is controlled.

“Will I become addicted to pain medicine?”

Becoming addicted to pain medicine is very rare. But if it is a concern, be sure to talk with your health care provider.

“Should I only take the prescribed medicine when the pain is severe?”

You should not wait until the pain becomes severe to take your medicine. Take your medicine at the prescribed times. Do not wait until the pain is severe. Your pain is easier to control when it is mild than when it is severe.



“Is chronic pain all in my head like some people say?”

The pain you are experiencing is very real. Emotional factors can greatly influence chronic pain. Therefore, psychological interventions are included in chronic pain treatment programs.

“Will I have side effects from my pain medicines?”

You may become constipated, nauseated or drowsy from the prescribed medicines. However, there are treatments that can reduce these side effects. Talk with your healthcare provider about any concerns you may have.

“What information will help my provider in managing my pain?”

Your provider will want to know how well your pain management is working. Information you can share with your provider is

What was the level of pain before you did something?

What did you do? What treatment did you use?

What was the level of pain about 1/2 hour after treatment?

Here’s a sample log for you to keep this information.

Pain Level	Treatment Used	Pain Level 1/2 hour later



Your Rights

- ◆ You have the right to receive information about pain and the ways to relieve your pain.
- ◆ You have the right to receive care from a concerned staff member who is committed to preventing your pain and helping to manage your pain.
- ◆ You have the right to have health care providers respond quickly to your report of pain.
- ◆ Your report of pain will be believed.
- ◆ You will receive care from pain relief specialists

Your Responsibilities

- ◆ You need to ask questions about what will happen to you and how your pain will be managed.
- ◆ You need to discuss choices with your healthcare providers when they recommend different treatments.
- ◆ You need to work with your healthcare providers when developing your pain management plan.
- ◆ You need to tell your health care provider if your treatment is not working and your pain is not relieved.
- ◆ You need to tell your healthcare provider when you first begin to have pain.
- ◆ You need to help your healthcare provider assess your pain. Answer questions honestly.
- ◆ You need to tell your healthcare provider about any worries you may have about taking pain medicine.