

Managing Chronic Pain: A Patient Handbook



calgary health region

leaders in health - a partner in care

What Is Chronic Pain?

It is an ongoing, unpleasant sensation and emotional experience. The source of the pain may or may not be known. Everyone has their own unique experience of chronic pain—what caused the pain, when the pain began, how long the pain has existed, and the effects of the pain on different areas of life.

Myth	Medical science can cure just about anything these days.
Fact	Sometimes pain cannot be cured.

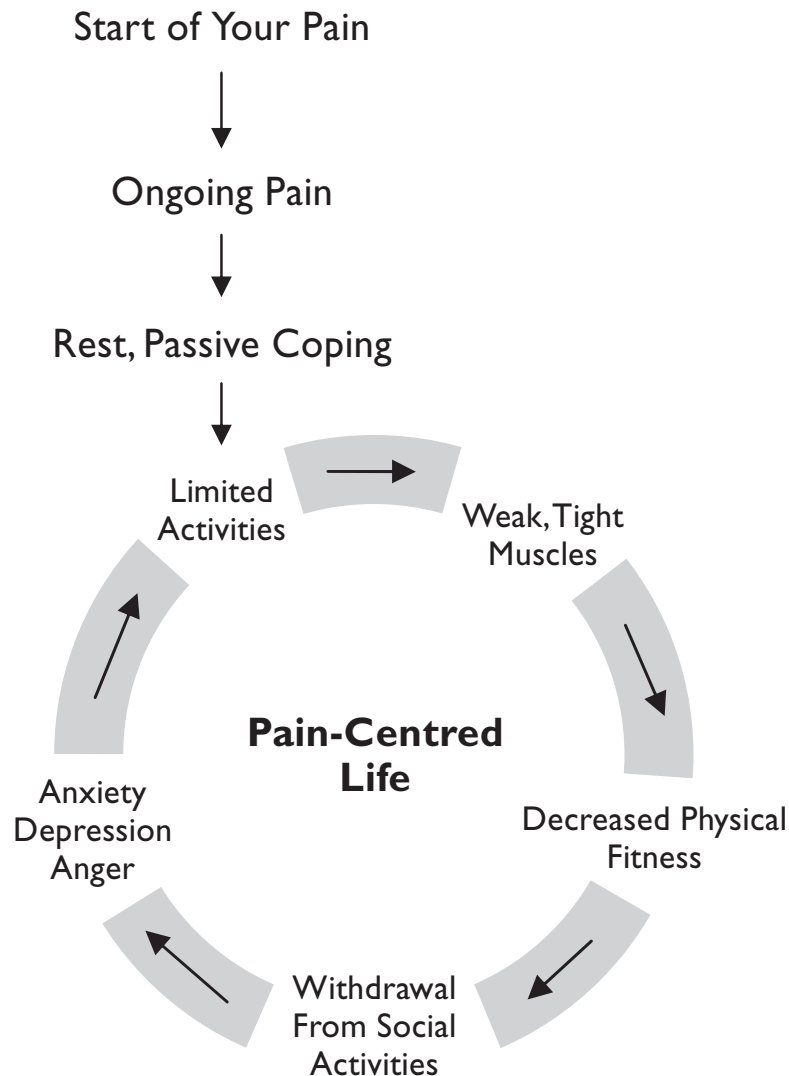
Causes of Chronic Pain	Sources of Chronic Pain	Words to Describe Pain	Related Symptoms
- Trauma	- Muscles	- Gnawing	- Tingling
- Diseases	- Nerves	- Burning	- Numbness
- Unknown	- Organs	- Sharp	- Tightness
	- Joints	- Stabbing	- Pulling
	- Circulation	- Aching	- Swelling
		- Throbbing	- Pressure

Myth	If there is no known physical cause and all tests are negative then it must be all in your head.
Fact	It is often the case in chronic pain that tests are negative, but the pain is real even though a cause may not be found.

Myth	You look so good! How can you have chronic pain?
Fact	There is often no outward sign (e.g. a cast) that a person has chronic pain.

The Impact of Chronic Pain

Chronic pain has physical, psychological, and social aspects. It is important for you to understand how chronic pain has impacted your life, as well as those around you. The following diagram illustrates the ongoing negative impact chronic pain can have when it is the central focus of your life.

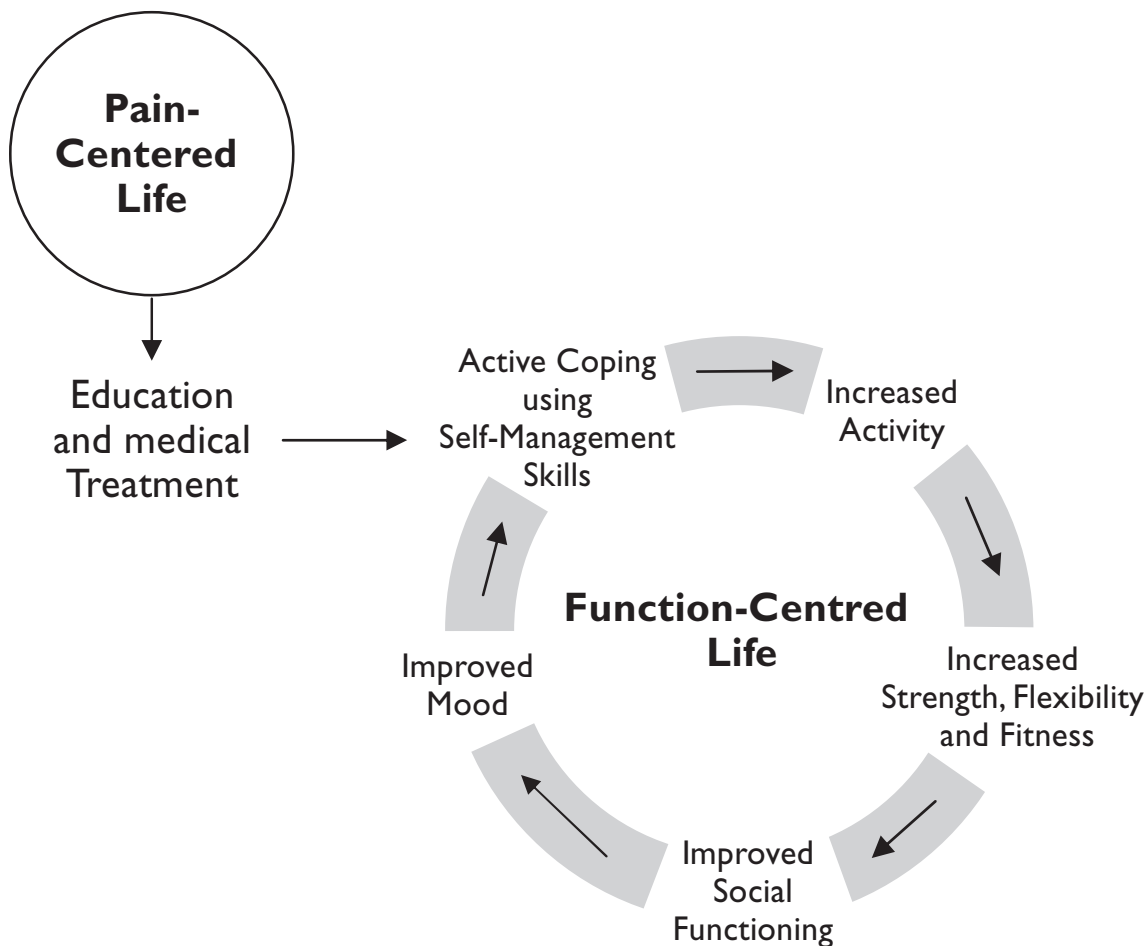


Chronic pain can negatively impact many areas of life, including:

- Work
- Relationships
- Mood
- Sexual intimacy
- Sleep
- Hobbies
- Self-esteem
- Future goals

A Change of Focus

After understanding how chronic pain has affected your life, you can move beyond the problem of chronic pain and its history and work towards living a more fulfilling life despite your pain. You can do this by learning self-management strategies (things you can do to help yourself to decrease pain and increase function). Progress may be slow and may level off at times.



An active approach to pain coping that regularly uses self-management skills can reduce the negative impact of pain. Positive effects can be felt in many areas of life, including:

- Work
- Relationships
- Mood
- Sexual intimacy
- Sleep
- Hobbies
- Self-esteem
- Future goals

Myth	You're using pain to get attention.
Fact	The disability caused by chronic pain is real and can lead to isolation.

Management of Chronic Pain

There are many ways to manage chronic pain. These range from passive (having something done to you) to active (using strategies to help yourself). Combining both approaches will give you the best pain management.

Passive Approaches

- Medications
- Procedures:
- Surgery/Other
- Hands-on therapy

Active Approaches

- Exercise
- Pacing
- Relaxation
- Positive thoughts
- Lifestyle changes
- Maintaining function
- Effective communication

Examples of Active Approaches

- Practice good posture
- Ask for help
- Good sleep habits
- Change negative thoughts
- Eat a healthy diet
- Stretch and strengthen
- Calm and clear communication

Myth	All opiate/narcotic medications lead to addiction.
Fact	Only a small percentage of people become addicted to opiate/narcotic medications used for pain management.

Pain Medication and Addiction

Many people are afraid that if they take pain medications (opiates/narcotics) they may become addicted. The risk of addiction is actually low. You are more at risk of becoming addicted to a medication if you or a family member has a history of an alcohol and/or drug addiction.

Reducing the Risk of Addiction

- Use medications only as directed by your doctor. Usually, people with chronic pain are prescribed medication at regularly scheduled times throughout the day. Your doctor may sometimes prescribe more medication on an “as needed” basic, within limits.
- Do not combine prescription medications with street drugs or alcohol to get more pain relief.
- Only take medications that are prescribed for you—do not borrow or lend medications

Myth	Increased pain levels always mean you are getting worse.
Fact	Although chronic pain does flare up at times, increased pain does not mean more damage is being done.

Personal Action Plan

A personal action plan is meant to save you from problem-solving at a time when pain and emotion are high. It can be used to guide your actions, as well as being used as a communication tool within the healthcare system.

The plan has two goals:

1. Prevention – learning to recognize symptoms/signs of a flare-up of pain.
2. Effective coping – using constructive strategies to control the experience of pain.

To make up your own personal action plan, ask yourself:

- What are the symptoms of a flare-up for me?
- What are some high-risk things I do that may lead to a flare-up? (e.g. lifting, worrying)
- What are some strategies I can use to manage a flare-up? (e.g. asking for help, using heat, doing a relaxation exercise)

Myth	It's been so long, you must be better by now.
Fact	Although healing has taken place, the pain can still continue.

What Else Can I Do to Manage My Own Pain?

- Be informed: read from the books/Internet resources (listed next), attend the Public Lecture Series at the Chronic Pain Centre (see “Local Support Systems”), or take part in the Living Well Chronic Pain classes (please see “Local Support Systems”).
- Form partnerships with your family doctor and other healthcare providers (to coordinate your care), and take part in local support groups (see “Local Support Systems”).

Resources

Books:

- Margaret Caudill, *Managing Pain Before it Manages You* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).
- David Butler, Lorimer Moseley, *Explain Pain* (Adelaide: Noigroup Publications, 2003).

Websites:

1. Chronic Pain – Canadian sites

a. Calgary:

- www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/rpp

b. Canadian:

- www.canadianpainsociety.ca
- www.chronicpaincanada.org
- www.fm-cfs.ca
- www.painexplained.ca

2. Chronic Pain – American

- www.stoppain.org
- www.ampainsoc.org
- www.painfoundation.org

3. Chronic Pain – International

- www.iasp-pain.org

4. Chronic Pain – Headache

- www.headachenetwork.ca
- www.ahsnet.org
- www.headache-help.org

5. Chronic Pain – Pelvic Pain

- www.pelvicpain.org
- www.nva.org

6. Pain in Children

- www.pediatric-pain.ca/index.html

7. Psychology and Chronic Pain

- www.cpa.ca/factsheets/chronic_pain.htm
- www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca

8. Other

- www.aapainmanage.org/links (has many links)
- www.addictioncentre.ca

Local Support Systems

1. Public Lecture Series: Learn more about chronic pain and its management

Calgary Health Region Chronic Pain Centre

- Introduction to Pain
- This is Your Body
- Pacing in Pain Management
- Medications
- Sleep
- The Role of Exercise in Pain Management
- Understanding Medical Investigations and the Healthcare System
- Anxiety, Depression, and Chronic Pain
- Nutrition
- Attention and Memory in Chronic Pain

For more information visit our website:

www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/rpp

To register call: 403-943-9925

2. *Chronic Pain Classes via Living Well Program: Actively take part in a group learning experience

- Pain Management Skills – coping skills to live with your pain.
- Occupational Therapy Tips – practical strategies for doing your daily activities without causing your pain to flare up.
- Explaining Pain – mechanisms that create pain and how to decrease nervous system wind-up.

To register call: 403-9-HEALTH (403-943-2584)

3. Arthritis Society, 403-228-2571
#200, 1301 8th St. SW
Calgary, Alberta
1-800-321-1433

4. Women's Health Resources, 403-944-2260
1441 29th St. NW
Calgary, Alberta

5. Calgary (Alberta) Neuropathy Association, 403-831-2187
email: calgary.ab.na@telus.net
www.calgarypnrs.org

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This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions, please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.

