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Chronic Pain

What is chronic pain?

Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/pain.html>] is a signal from your nervous system that something may be wrong. It is an unpleasant feeling, such as a prick, tingle, sting, burn, or ache. Pain may be sharp or dull. You may feel pain in one area of your body or all over. Each person feels pain differently, even if the reason for the pain is the same.

Pain might be acute or chronic. The type of pain is based on how long and how often you have pain. Acute pain starts suddenly and goes away when the cause is treated or healed. This pain lets you know that you may be injured or have a problem you need to take care of. Chronic pain lasts longer than three months or the time in which you should have healed.

If you have chronic pain, it can occur most days or every day and may last for weeks, months, or even years. It can affect all aspects of daily life, including your mood and relationships. Treatment may not get rid of chronic pain, but it can help with your symptoms.

What causes chronic pain?

Sometimes, acute pain can become chronic pain. The original cause may have been an injury or infection, or you may have an ongoing cause of pain, such as [arthritis](https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>] or [cancer](https://medlineplus.gov/cancer.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/cancer.html>]. In some cases, there is no clear cause. Environmental factors and psychological factors such as mood and stress can make chronic pain worse.

What are the symptoms of chronic pain?

Since people feel pain in different ways, two people could have the same issue, but each may have different symptoms. Chronic pain can occur anywhere in your body and may cause other symptoms such as [fatigue](https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html>], mood changes, or [difficulty sleeping](https://medlineplus.gov/sleepdisorders.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepdisorders.html>]. If you have [depression](https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html>] or stress, it may make chronic pain worse.

Who is more likely to get chronic pain?

Many older adults have chronic pain. Women also report having more chronic pain than men, and they are at a greater risk for many pain conditions. Some people have two or more chronic pain conditions. You may be more likely to have chronic pain if you have certain medical conditions such as:

- Headaches [<https://medlineplus.gov/headache.html>] or migraines [<https://medlineplus.gov/migraine.html>]
- Cancer
- Fibromyalgia [<https://medlineplus.gov/fibromyalgia.html>]
- Arthritis
- Nerve damage [<https://medlineplus.gov/peripheralnervedisorders.html>]
- Back problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/backpain.html>]

How is chronic pain diagnosed?

Chronic pain lasts three months or longer or when pain continues after your body has healed. If the cause of your pain is unknown, your health care provider may:

- Ask you about your medical history
- Ask you to describe the pain and how it affects your life
- Do a physical exam
- Order blood tests or other medical tests

What are the treatments for chronic pain?

Chronic pain is not always curable, but treatments can help. Treatments may include medicines, including pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>] . There are also non-drug treatments [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>] , such as acupuncture [<https://medlineplus.gov/acupuncture.html>] , physical therapy, and sometimes surgery.

Depending on the cause of your pain and your symptoms, your provider may also recommend lifestyle changes which may include suggestions for:

- Improving mental health [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtoimprovementalhealth.html>]
- Managing stress [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>]
- Getting to and staying at a healthy weight [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>]
- Adding low-impact exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/benefitsofexercise.html>]

Start Here

- Chronic Pain [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/chronic-pain/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/condition-chronic-pain-es/?adfree=true>]
- Pain [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/pain>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Stopping Pain Before It Turns Chronic [<https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/stopping-pain-before-it-turns-chronic>] (Harvard Medical School)

Treatments and Therapies

- Antidepressants: Another Weapon against Chronic Pain [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/back-pain/in-depth/pain-medications/art-20045647?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/back-pain/in-depth/pain-medications/art-20045647?p=1>]
- Managing Pain: Moving beyond Opioids [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2018/10/managing-pain>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/control-del-dolor>]
- Non-Drug Pain Management: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]
- Pain Relievers: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/painrelievers.html>]

Living With

- Coping with Chronic Pain [<https://www.apa.org/topics/pain/chronic?partner=nlm>] (American Psychological Association)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.apa.org/topics/pain/dolor?partner=nlm>]

Related Issues

- Chronic Pain (For Employees) [<https://askjan.org/disabilities/Chronic-Pain.cfm?>] (Office of Disability Employment Policy)

Specifics

- Amplified Musculoskeletal Pain Syndrome (AMPS) [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/amplified-musculoskeletal-pain-syndrome-amps>] (American College of Rheumatology)
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/sindrome-de-dolor-musculoesqueletico-amplificado-amps>]
- Central Pain Syndrome [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/central-pain-syndrome>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
- Myofascial Pain Syndrome [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/myofascial-pain-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20375444?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/myofascial-pain-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20375444?p=1>]

Statistics and Research

- Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain: What the Science Says [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/providers/digest/complementary-health-approaches-for-chronic-pain-science>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Chronic Pain [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Chronic+Pain%22&aggFilters=status:not%20recruiting>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Effect of foot reflexology on chronic pain in Parkinson's disease: A... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40720491>]
- Article: Effects of reformer pilates on pain, psychological factors, and sleep in... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40713915>]
- Article: Effectiveness of ultrasonography-guided periforaminal oxygen-ozone therapy in chronic low back pain. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40686713>]
- Chronic Pain -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Chronic+Pain%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Find a Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Physician [https://members.aapmr.org/AAPMR/AAPMR_FINDER.aspx] (American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation)
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/>] 
- Pain Consortium [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/current-research/trans-agency-activities/pain-consortium>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)

Older Adults

- Pain Management [<https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/pain-management/basic-facts>] (American Geriatrics Society)

Patient Handouts

- Managing your chronic back pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000516.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000516.htm>]

- Pain and your emotions [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000417.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000417.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Managing your chronic back pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000516.htm>]

Pain and your emotions [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000417.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Non-Drug Pain Management [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]

Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/pain.html>]

Pain Relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Chronic Pain* is the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/>]

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

"Ouch, That Hurts!" The Science of Pain [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/ouch-that-hurts-the-science-of-pain>]

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