



CHRONIC PAIN



About 1 in 5 Canadians live with chronic pain. That's nearly 8 million Canadians. (1)

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

Chronic pain can show up in many ways - the pain can be constant and unremitting, or can come and go with significant flare-ups. Chronic pain is defined as pain that has lasted more than 3 months, but also involves emotional distress. Often, people with chronic pain feel isolated, not believed, and have trouble accessing helpful treatment and support. Chronic pain can impact every part of a person's life, beyond just their health. Often a person's sense of self can be affected, as well as their ability to socialize, make a living or take part in everyday activities. Understandably, someone with chronic pain is also four times more likely to experience anxiety or depression. (2, 3)



WHY DOES CHRONIC PAIN HAPPEN?

Chronic pain is not 'all in your head' or your fault. Chronic pain can happen after an injury, from an underlying disease or issue, or without a clear cause. Chronic pain is also deeply influenced by emotion, cognition and behaviour. People who have experienced one or more adverse childhood experience are much more likely to experience chronic pain, as well as people facing social inequity. A main driver of chronic pain is a nervous system that has become more protective, making everyday life activities painful. The good news is that you can train your nervous systems back into a less sensitive state! See below for a few simple ways to help a sensitized nervous system feel safe again. (4, 5)

GENTLE MOVEMENT

We know that the last thing someone with chronic pain might feel like doing is getting up and moving around, but gentle and well-paced movement can help your nervous system to relearn that movement and activity is safe, which is a crucial part to reducing long-term pain.

Keeping this movement consistent and gently increasing over time can help build up circulation, strength and mobility, and can help retrain a sensitive nervous system to be less protective.

Try prioritizing flexibility over perfection. Start by identifying a "flare-safe" range for you - the amount of activity that you could safely do without flaring up your pain significantly for more than 24 hours. This may be very small at first, and that's okay! On good days, you can try stretching this amount a little, and work towards slowly increasing your capacity over time. (5, 6)



MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Many people with chronic pain find that their lives shrink beyond recognition. It can feel particularly challenging to enjoy activities while in pain, and many people with chronic pain find they do less and less of the activities they love over time.

Choose an activity that feels meaningful to you. This might include art, reading, gardening, sports, crafting, walking outside, listening to music, playing with pets - anything that feels positive and connected to a value you have. Avoid choosing something that feels like an obligation, but instead prioritize activities that align with who you want to be — even during pain.

Making time for activities you love (or used to love) can actually reduce your pain over time. Feeling the reward of doing something meaningful or enjoyable can interrupt pain signals in your brain, and help your nervous system reorient towards safety, pleasure and a sense of agency. All of this helps decrease your sensitivity to pain over time.



It may take a while for these activities to feel rewarding again. Be patient and keep at it! (7,8)

MINDFULNESS

Did you know that stress can increase how protective our pain system becomes, leading to stronger feelings of pain? Thankfully, there are tools that can help us with this. Mindfulness, guided meditations and slow breathing (with longer exhales than inhales) can help calm stress and ultimately help to reduce your pain. Even five or ten minutes a day can help relax your stress-related muscle tension and gradually reduce pain intensity over time. (10)

TREATMENT



Treating chronic pain is possible! The most effective treatments tend to use a combination of pain education, movement, and psychological or lifestyle supports. Supports can include Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), neurofeedback, mindfulness training, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Pain (CBT-P), and trauma-informed therapies like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Pain Reprocessing Therapy (PRT) is also a newer treatment with early research suggesting benefits. (9)

PAIN IN THE ARTS



Pain in the Arts is a free local arts-based program made for people with chronic pain, to help build resilience, foster connection, practice mindfulness tools and learn evidence-based pain education.

This class is developed and facilitated by Meg Neufeld, who has lived pain experience, art expertise, and training in mindfulness. Pain in the Arts follows the Canadian Pain Task Force (2021) recommendations, and is funded by the Step Forward Health Society.

LOVED ONES



Caring for someone with chronic pain can be both rewarding and challenging. One of the most helpful things you can offer is understanding and validation - listening without trying to solve the pain. Encouraging small steps, pacing, and celebrating progress can help them feel supported without pressure. And remember: caring for yourself is just as important as caring for them, so you can show up with patience, steadiness, and compassion.

MORE INFORMATION

1. Health Canada. Canadian Pain Task Force Report: An Action Plan for Pain in Canada. Government of Canada, Mar. 2021, p. 4.
2. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/chronic-pain/about-chronic-pain.html>
3. https://journals.lww.com/pain/abstract/2003/11000/mood_and_anxiety_disorders_associated_with_chronic.17.aspx
4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20008066.2023.2284025>
5. <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/f17ce366-a095-48be-835e-a3d7fa81adf2/content>
6. <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD011279.pub2/full>
7. https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/health/documents/topics/documents/programs/pdmp/Mod-2_Behavioral_Activation_An_Effective_Pain_Management_Strategy.pdf
8. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9161098/>
9. Canadian Pain Task Force. (2021). An Action Plan for Pain in Canada.
10. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4941786/>

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24/7 HELP LINES - PHONE

1-800-SUICIDE	1-800-784-2433
Crisis Line / Mental Health Support	310-6789 (no area code needed)
Fraser Health Crisis Line	604-951-8855
Kids Help Line (BC)	310-1234 (no area code needed)
Kids Help Line (Canada)	1-800-668-6868
KUU-US Crisis Line (Aboriginal)	1-800-588-8717
VictimLink	1-800-563-0808
Youth Against Violence Line	1-800-680-4264
Child Protection Services BC	1-800-663-9122

PAIN AGENCIES

Pain BC	painbc.ca	+1 844-430-0818
People in Pain Network	pipain.com	info@pipain.com
The Chronic Pain Network	cpn-rdc.ca	(905) 525-9140 ext. 27359
Self-Management British Columbia	selfmanagementbc.ca	1-866-902-3767

SUBSTANCE USE HELP

Alcohol and Drug Resources	604-660-9382
Pacific Community Resource Society	604-836-6273
Deltassist (North Delta)	604-594-3455
Deltassist (Ladner & Tsawwassen)	604-946-9526
Alcoholics Anonymous	604-434-3933
Narcotics Anonymous	604-873-1018

MENTAL WELLBEING APPS

BoosterBuddy
Calm
Headspace
Mindshift
MyLife