

LIVING WELL WITH CHRONIC PAIN

FOR TEENS



AGES 13-17



MANAGING PAIN: A CHEAT SHEET



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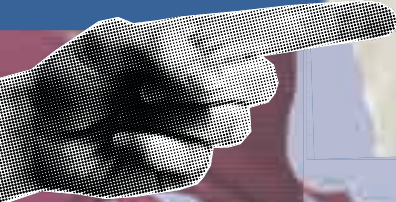


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The information provided in this booklet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be used as professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The U.S. Pain Foundation does not endorse any specific treatment or approach to treatment. For specific questions or concerns, consult your doctor. References, citations, and sources found in this booklet can be located at uspainfoundation.org/pain/lwwcp



What is Chronic Pain?

Have you ever experienced pain that just won't go away? Pain that lasts for months, or even years, is called **chronic pain**.

Chronic pain can happen anywhere in your body. It might feel like burning, stabbing, aching, or pulsing, to name a few—but you may also describe **your pain** in other ways. Sometimes, we can find out why it's happening through tests, but often, the exact cause might always be a mystery.

When pain becomes chronic, the goal is to manage it instead of trying to get rid of it completely.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution—what works for one person might not work for another, even if they have the same conditions or type of pain.

Pain can change the way our nervous system and brain work. It can make you feel sad, stressed, scared, frustrated, overwhelmed, lonely, or just plain angry. That's why it's important to take care of your whole self, not just your physical symptoms.

Living with chronic pain isn't easy, but it's still possible to have fun and do meaningful activities with friends and family. Be kind to yourself, celebrate the small wins, and make your health a priority. And always remember, there are others going through the same things as you who understand, and you can reach out for support.



Causes, Risk Factors, & Diagnosis

A variety of things can up your chances of experiencing long-term pain. Here are some of the big ones:




- **Genetics or family history**
- **Age**
- **Being assigned female at birth**
- **Having surgery**
- **Having higher body weight**
- **Stress or mood disorders**
- **Previous injury or trauma**

The most common types of pain in young people are back pain, belly pain, arthritis, and migraine and headache disorders. But there are tons of other chronic pain conditions out there that you may be dealing with, too.

Scientists are working to find better ways to measure and treat chronic pain, but right now, there's no magic test that can tell us exactly what's going on in your body and then just zap away the pain.

It's really important to be open and honest with your doctor about how you're feeling so they can look for answers and provide the best care. It can be helpful to keep a “pain diary” that tracks how your pain feels, when and how it changes, and anything that helps relieve it.

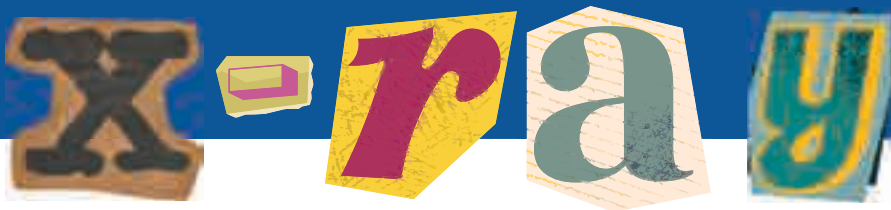




Depending on what kind of pain you're dealing with, your doctor might suggest these diagnostic tests:



- **Bloodwork:** They might need to draw some blood to check things out.
- **Imaging:** Think fancy stuff like MRIs, X-rays, CT scans, or ultrasounds.
- **Diagnostic injections:** Sometimes they gotta poke around a bit to see what's going on.
- **Electromyography:** This one's all about checking how your muscles are working.
- **Nerve conduction testing:** Testing your nerves to see if they're firing on all cylinders.
- **Neurological assessments:** Basically, they're checking how your brain and body communicate.
- **Mobility and strength assessments:** These show how flexible and strong you are.
- **Genetic testing:** They might need to take a peek in your genes to look for answers.





An Introduction to Pain Management

Each person's experience with pain is different. Finding the right treatment can take time and experimentation. It's normal to feel discouraged if something doesn't work, but it's important to not give up and to keep exploring other options to see what works best for you.

When you're searching for treatments, having support from people who understand can keep you going. You can find that community at painconnection.org by joining U.S. Pain's Teen Pain Warriors group, a free peer support group just for people like you between 13 and 17 years old. We also have a Pediatric Pain Warrior Program with resources and events for kids, teens, and families—learn more at uspainfoundation.org/pediatricpainwarriors.



It's a good idea to see a specialist who is specifically trained in pain management. They can suggest different treatments like medicine, physical therapy, and pain coping skills training. It's unlikely that one therapy or treatment by itself will manage your pain. **Multidisciplinary care**—combining different treatments—can help provide the best results.

Although it might feel hopeless, keep in mind that researchers are always discovering new ways to help manage pain. **Don't lose hope.**



Tips for Managing Pain

- **Start small.** Start with low-risk strategies like physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling. Save the heavy-duty stuff like medications, injections, or surgeries for later—they come with their own set of challenges.
- **Do your research.** Learn as much as you can about your conditions and treatments using reliable sources like government agencies, well-known health websites, and nonprofits like U.S. Pain. Especially with less-common conditions, your doctor might not be an expert, and you need to be informed.
- **Get the most out of doctor visits.** Bring a list of questions and spell out your goals—you may want to ask about sleep patterns, new or worsening pain, or wanting to be able to do sports or other activities with your friends. Your voice is important when building a treatment plan. Ask for help at appointments from a friend or family member if you need it.
- **Stay on top of things.** Keep everything organized in a binder or folder—appointments, test results, treatment plans, insurance details, your pain diary, the whole shebang. You have the right to access your medical records from any provider you visit.
- **Mind your mental health.** Chronic pain can mess with your mood, and stress can make your pain worse. A support group, pain psychologist, psychiatrist, or counselor can help.
- **Make some noise.** If your insurance doesn't want to cover a treatment or specialist, don't throw in the towel. Your clinician, family members, and state health advocacy offices can help with navigating insurance hassles.
- **Explore tailored programs.** Some pediatric medical centers have in-depth pain management programs. These can jump-start your treatment plan and give you more resources.
- **Look into clinical trials.** If you can't find a treatment that works, consider joining a clinical trial. These studies often give you access to cutting-edge therapies not available to everyone. But, since these therapies are new, be extra cautious and talk to your doctors about potential risks, side effects, and how they interact with your other treatments.
- **Ask for school accommodations.** Your parents or guardians, doctors, and school officials can work with you to build a specialized plan to help make school days a little easier (called an Individualized Health Plan, Individualized Education Plan, or 504 Plan). This may include things like having more time to take tests or finish assignments, getting help with taking notes, having access to different seating or being able to stand, or modifying your gym classes.





Treatment Options

There are tons of potential ways to manage pain. Feel free to discuss this list of treatment options with your health care provider. Try less-intrusive options first, and remember that combining therapies may maximize your results. You can learn more about some of these treatment options later in this booklet.



SELF-MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- Activity modification or pacing
- Assistive devices or technologies
- Meditation, mindfulness, and stress reduction
- Nutrition and movement
- Sleep hygiene (building habits that promote healthy, consistent sleep)

RESTORATIVE THERAPIES

- Bodywork (such as chiropractic care or trigger point therapy)
- Dry needling
- Exercise programs
- Flotation therapy (such as salt tanks)
- Heat and cold therapy
- Kinesiology taping
- Massage therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Osteopathic medicine
- Physical therapy
- Pool or aquatic therapy
- Postural training
- Traction therapy



Treatment Options



COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH OPTIONS

- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Art, music, dance, and equine therapy
- Ayurvedic medicine
- Craniosacral therapy
- Cupping
- Herbal and vitamin products
- Hypnosis
- Reflexology
- Reiki
- Tai Chi
- Traditional Chinese medicine
- Yoga



MIND-BODY AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH APPROACHES

Addressing the mental impact of pain does not mean your pain isn't real. But stress increases pain, and pain magnifies stress. Interrupting this cycle is essential to improving your quality of life.

- Biofeedback or neurofeedback
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Counseling and therapy
- Meditation, mindfulness, and stress reduction
- Psychiatric care
- Spirituality
- Support groups
- Virtual reality programs



Treatment Options



MEDICATIONS

Medications can be administered in a variety of ways—orally, through injections or infusions, or by applying to the skin.


- Creams or lotions that help relieve pain, sometimes called local anesthetics or topicals
- Medical cannabis and CBD (discuss with your parents or guardians and doctors, and check the laws in your state)
- Medical foods
- Medications specifically for pain and inflammation, including over-the-counter and prescription painkillers
- Medications that treat specific conditions, like migraine or autoimmune disorders
- Meds that treat other conditions—like depression, seizures, or muscle tightness—but can also help with pain

EXTERNAL NEUROMODULATION AND STIMULATION DEVICES

- Electrical stimulation devices and nerve stimulation
- Infrared light therapy
- Laser therapy
- Pulse therapy
- Ultrasound therapy

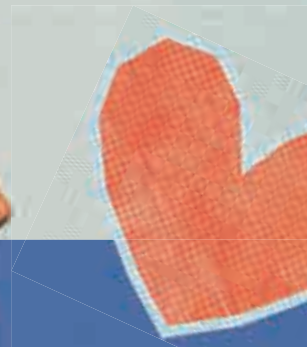
INTERVENTIONAL PROCEDURES

- A variety of injections, joint or nerve blocks, or infusions can treat pain
- Implanted devices, like pain pumps or spinal cord stimulators, can help tackle pain from the inside out
- There are procedures that are more serious, like neurolysis—which can help your nerves and tissues—and surgeries that may help treat chronic pain when other treatment options have not helped



CREATE YOUR OWN PAIN PLAN

There is no easy fix for chronic pain. But there are many things you can try to help ease the pain and make it less disruptive to your life. To see a list of these treatment options, plus many more, and figure out which ones might be best for you, check out our website, mypainplan.org. You can use it to create a personalized pain management plan that makes sense for YOU—then print it out and share it with your doctors!



Self-Management Strategies

Self-management techniques are simple things you can do at home, on top of the treatments from your doctor. By taking charge of your own well-being, you can decrease pain and improve your overall quality of life.

ACTIVITY MODIFICATION OR PACING

It can be tough to change your routine when you're used to doing things a certain way, but it's important to listen to your body's limits and find strategies to work with them. Be patient with yourself as you navigate these adjustments.

You know yourself best; it's important to listen to your body. Taking short breaks every few hours might help, or you may need to rest before and after physical activity. You also might need to gradually work your way up to being able to complete the activities you want to do. **This is called pacing.** It's important to strike a balance between resting and staying active to maintain your strength and mobility.

Ask for help from professionals like occupational therapists or ergonomics specialists. There are plenty of assistive devices and tools that may help you, like braces, ring splints, canes, chairs, standing desks, keyboards, or adaptive technology such as speech-to-text software if typing is challenging.



EXERCISE AND MOVEMENT

Getting active with chronic pain might seem like an uphill battle, but even the smallest steps can make a big difference. Here's why:

- Movement helps build strength, flexibility, and stamina, which chronic pain can weaken.
- Moving helps protect your joints and organs by reducing strain from extra body weight.
- It's good for your heart; not being active enough can lead to heart problems.
- Physical activity releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins, which can help you deal with pain and stress.

Start with gentle activities like yoga, walking, Tai Chi, or swimming. Talk to your doctor before starting any new routine to make sure it's safe for you. If anything hurts, it's okay to take a break.

SLEEP HYGIENE

Teens dealing with chronic pain may struggle to sleep well. But not getting enough sleep can make the pain worse. Here are some tips that may help improve your sleep quality:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. This helps your body build a routine. Reading, meditating, or listening to calming music before bed can also help.
- Make your sleeping space comfortable. Try using earplugs, comfortable bedding, and keeping your room cool. Also, avoid using electronic devices like phones and tablets for at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Watch what you eat and drink. Avoid caffeine or sugar before bed.
- Don't nap for too long. Try to limit naps to 30 minutes, and give yourself at least four hours between a nap and bedtime. Gentle movement during the day can also help you sleep better at night.

If you're still having trouble sleeping, a sleep specialist can offer more personalized advice and support to help you get the rest you need.



STRESS REDUCTION

Dealing with pain can make you feel more stressed, and stress can make pain worse. By actively working to reduce stress, you can not only cope better with the pain but maybe even dial it down a notch.

Here are some ways to do it:

- Meditation or breathing exercises
- Music, art, or dancing
- Journaling
- Getting enough rest and setting boundaries—don't feel bad about saying “no”
- Focusing on what you can do, not what you can't
- Letting go of feeling guilty or embarrassed about your pain

If you need help dealing with your feelings about your pain, or learning how to pace yourself or do things differently, talking to a counselor or therapist can help.

NUTRITION

Eating whole or natural foods is crucial for maintaining health and feeling good. Follow these basic rules:

- Try to eat lots of fruits and veggies
- Cut down on sugary and processed foods
- Try eating nutritious fats from fish, nuts, oils, and avocados, and cut back on saturated and trans fats
- Drink plenty of water

If needed, a licensed dietician can offer personalized advice.



SOCIAL CONNECTION

Dealing with pain can make you feel like you're on your own island. It's tough when even simple things like going for a drive or hanging out with friends become challenging.

Talk to your friends and family about what you're going through so they can understand how to support you. Think about joining a group that shares your interests, whether it's gaming, art, or something else entirely. You could also check out local clubs or volunteer opportunities in your area.

Finding people who get what you're going through can be a game-changer. The U.S. Pain Foundation offers a Pediatric Pain Warriors Program - CHECK IT OUT AT uspainfoundation.org/pediatricpainwarriors where you can connect with others who understand. There are also online support groups for specific pain conditions.





Emotional Well-Being

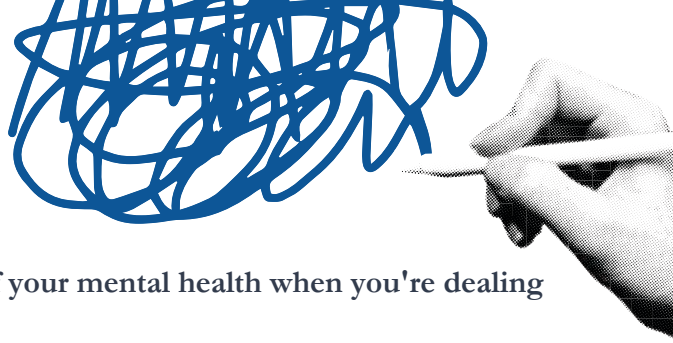
It's totally normal to feel anxious or down when you're dealing with constant pain. Please know that feeling this way is okay—it doesn't mean you're different, overly sensitive, or not strong enough.

Even though we know that pain affects not just your body but also your mood and thoughts, sometimes mental health takes a backseat when you're focused on treating the physical side of things.

What's tricky is that mental health stuff can make the pain worse, and pain can make your mental well-being worse, too. It's a tough cycle. But this does NOT mean the pain is all in your head. Basically, your mind and body are companions—what affects one can affect the other. That's why taking care of your emotions can actually help you handle your pain better.

Did you know that the U.S. Pain Foundation hosts a free, online monthly peer support group for teens ages 13-17? Learn about managing pain, resilience techniques, and coping strategies. Visit painconnection.org/teen-pain-support-group to join.





Here are tips for taking care of your mental health when you're dealing with chronic pain:

- **Therapy:** Counseling or therapy can teach you coping skills to help handle difficult emotions, and help you learn how to live a fulfilling life despite pain.
- **Biofeedback:** Sensors help you understand how your body functions, teaching you to control things like your heart rate or breathing to help manage pain, depression, or anxiety.
- **Medication:** Psychiatrists can prescribe meds to help with mental health issues like depression or anxiety, and some of those meds may also help with chronic pain.
- **Peer support:** There are support groups where you can learn from others who understand what you're going through, and get tips for dealing with chronic pain.
- **Meditation, mindfulness, and stress reduction:** These practices can help you mentally deal with pain, which can actually make the pain feel less intense. You can also try aromatherapy, journaling, or spending time in nature.



Sometimes, the strain of dealing with chronic pain and emotional challenges can become overwhelming and feel like it's too much to handle. If you are in crisis, are having suicidal thoughts, or are thinking of hurting yourself, there are people who can help. You can:

- Call or text **988**, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or visit **988lifeline.org** to chat
- Reach the Crisis Text Line at **crisistextline.org** or by texting **HOME** to **741741**

About U.S. Pain Foundation

The U.S. Pain Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people with chronic illnesses or serious injuries that cause pain. We offer free programs and services like:

- ***INvisible Project*** - A magazine sharing stories of people living with chronic pain, including teens and young adults.
- **State and Federal Advocacy** - We're your voice on the front lines, working with lawmakers to make pain care more accessible and affordable.
- **Pain Connection** - Free online peer support groups, including a teen group, led by trained facilitators who understand what you're going through. Another group is for parents and guardians or other people who help take care of you.
- **Pediatric Pain Warrior Program** - Helps children, teens, and families through a summer camp, retreats, workshops, and more.
- **Building Your Toolbox** - You and your parents or guardians can learn valuable pain management tips and tricks through our monthly educational series.
- **MyPainPlan.org** - An interactive site to explore treatment categories and build a personalized list of treatment options to discuss with your doctors.
- **Storybank** - A place to share YOUR story and help others like you feel less alone.
- **Volunteer Network** - A team of people spreading awareness about chronic pain and the importance of looking out for each other.



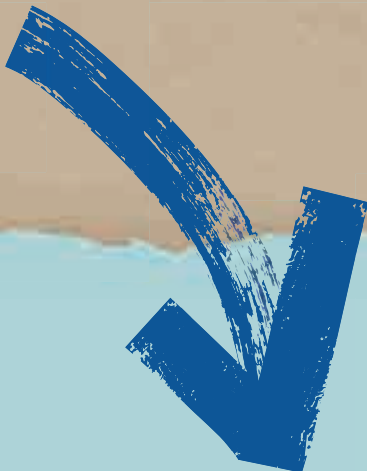
Find out more at uspainfoundation.org.

This educational booklet was created with support from Kenvue. The U.S. Pain Foundation independently developed the content without review from its sponsor. This information is for educational purposes only and may not be used as a substitute for advice from a health care professional.

Connect with other teens and families who get it

Looking for others who understand what you're going through? U.S. Pain Foundation's Pediatric Pain Warrior Program is for teens and families like you. It offers resources, events, an annual summer camp, retreats, workshops, and more. Check it out today!

uspainfoundation.org/pediatricpainwarriors



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