

# Chronic Pain: Care Instructions

## Your Care Instructions

Chronic pain is pain that lasts a long time (months or even years) and may or may not have a clear cause. It is different from acute pain, which usually does have a clear cause—like an injury or illness—and gets better over time. Chronic pain:

- Lasts over time but may vary from day to day.
- Does not go away despite efforts to end it.
- May disrupt your sleep and lead to fatigue.
- May cause depression or anxiety.
- May make your muscles tense, causing more pain.
- Can disrupt your work, hobbies, home life, and relationships with friends and family.

Chronic pain is a very real condition. It is not just in your head. Treatment can help and usually includes several methods used together, such as medicines, physical therapy, exercise, and other treatments. Learning how to relax and changing negative thought patterns can also help you cope.

Chronic pain is complex. Taking an active role in your treatment will help you better manage your pain. Tell your doctor if you have trouble dealing with your pain. You may have to try several things before you find what works best for you.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

- Pace yourself. Break up large jobs into smaller tasks. Save harder tasks for days when you have less pain, or go back and forth between hard tasks and easier ones. Take rest breaks.
- Relax, and reduce stress. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation can help.
- Keep moving. Gentle, daily exercise can help reduce pain over the long run. Try low- or no-impact exercises such as walking, swimming, and stationary biking. Do stretches to stay flexible.
- Try heat, cold packs, and massage.
- Get enough sleep. Chronic pain can make you tired and drain your energy. Talk with your doctor if you have trouble sleeping because of pain.
- Think positive. Your thoughts can affect your pain level. Do things that you enjoy to distract yourself when you have pain instead of focusing on the pain. See a movie, read a book, listen to music, or spend time with a friend.
- If you think you are depressed, talk to your doctor about treatment.
- Keep a daily pain diary. Record how your moods, thoughts, sleep patterns, activities, and medicine affect your pain. You may find that your pain is worse during or after certain activities or when you are feeling a certain emotion. Having a record of your pain can help you and your doctor find the best ways to treat your pain.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.

## Reducing constipation caused by pain medicine

- Include fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains in your diet each day. These foods are high in fiber.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. Walking is a good choice. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk every day. Try for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- Schedule time each day for a bowel movement. A daily routine may help. Take your time and do not strain when having a bowel movement.

## **When should you call for help?**

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your pain gets worse or is out of control.
- You feel down or blue, or you do not enjoy things like you once did. You may be depressed, which is common in people with chronic pain. Depression can be treated.
- You have vomiting or cramps for more than 2 hours.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You cannot sleep because of pain.
- You are very worried or anxious about your pain.
- You have trouble taking your pain medicine.
- You have any concerns about your pain medicine.
- You have trouble with bowel movements, such as:
  - No bowel movement in 3 days.
  - Blood in the anal area, in your stool, or on the toilet paper.
  - Diarrhea for more than 24 hours.

## **Where can you learn more?**

Go to <http://burgawmedicalcenter.com/>, log into the web portal, and enter N004 in the search box to learn more about Chronic Pain: Care Instructions.

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