

Useful Contacts

 <p>Chronic Pain Scotland for patients and healthcare professionals</p>	<p>www.chronicpainscotland.org Scottish government's information centre. Includes lots of helpful advice on living well</p>
	<p>www.painconcern.org.uk Lots of information and support for chronic pain sufferers - including a forum and helpline - from one of the UK's leading pain charities</p>
	<p>http://www.stepstones.org.uk/ Advice and information about stress management services in West Dunbartonshire</p>
	<p>www.painassociation.com Lots of sound advice on living well with your pain from a major Scottish pain charity</p>

Patient Information Centres at the New Stobhill and Victoria Hospitals

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Living with Chronic Pain



What is Chronic Pain?

Put very simply, chronic pain is pain that has lasted for longer than three months.

How is Chronic Pain different?

It is a confusing type of pain because when you have had pain for this long it becomes different to the normal short-lived pain we are all used to. The main difference is that the pain system, which is made up of the nerves in our skin and muscles, along with the spine and the brain, becomes more sensitive. When the pain system becomes too sensitive it is easy to provoke a pain flare-up.

Why does chronic pain feel so much worse on some days?

Even small increases in activity can sometimes cause a flare-up, which can be alarming and cause people to worry. Because of this extra difficulty with doing things, people who have chronic pain often do less activity overall and as a result they can lose some physical fitness. When we are less fit, it doesn't take much activity to provoke a pain flare-up. The way that pain affects fitness, and fitness affects pain, has been described as a 'vicious cycle'. Other factors, such as stress, the weather, and minor infections can also cause short-term increases in pain.

Why is it so difficult to diagnose chronic pain?

It is impossible to 'see' chronic pain. Usually, x-rays, scans, or blood tests don't show a reason for the amount of pain that people are experiencing. This is because most chronic pain is due to the pain system becoming too sensitive, alongside a loss in physical fitness, neither of which will show up on a scan.

The effects of chronic pain

We know that chronic pain comes with lots of social, family and financial problems and people with chronic pain can feel desperate. Desperation for pain relief or a cure can use up a lot of time, money and energy. Thinking about pain all the time can make the pain system even more sensitive - another 'vicious cycle'.

The good news is that there are ways to break out of the vicious cycle of chronic pain. We hope this leaflet will reassure you that your experiences are not unusual and provide you with some tips to help you live as full a life as possible, despite having pain.

Tips on how to manage your pain

Get into a routine - Try and do a similar amount of activity everyday. Don't rest too much but don't push too hard either. If you want to do more, build up gradually

Learn to relax - Having pain can be a stressful experience. Find out more about relaxing, get some support from friends or professionals, and learn some ways to relax and unwind. Learning to meditate can be very helpful.

Pain killers - Painkillers are unlikely to 'cure' your pain but they can be a helpful tool. It is important to take them as prescribed by your doctor as some medicines only work when you take them regularly. Side-effects are common. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist for help.

Stay involved - It can be easy to avoid seeing family and friends when you're in pain. Keep up regular contact otherwise it may be difficult to get back into things.

Exercise - Not working or doing less overall leads to a loss of fitness which can make pain worse. Keep up some form of regular exercise. Remember, when starting out that you will not be able to do as much as before.

Be patient - Chronic pain can be frustrating and change can be slow. Being desperate for things to improve only tends to make things worse. Be kind to yourself when things are difficult. Take things gradually and don't give up!

Keep up hobbies and interests - This can often seem impossible when you have pain but many people do manage.

Try and maintain your interests, even if this interest has to be expressed differently or develop new hobbies which won't force you into a flare-up.