

Steps for Dealing with Chronic Pain

- Be sure to get your pain diagnosed correctly. Sometimes pain results from a disease and we treat the disease. Sometimes pain has become a disease in itself and we treat the pain. We often need to treat both.
- Acceptance does not equal resignation. Accepting that pain may be chronic DOES NOT mean there is nothing you can do.
- Get involved in your own treatment and care.
It often helps to keep a pain activity diary to determine the pain cycles in an average day. This helps you know what works best and what aggravates.
- Take medication prescribed for you on schedule at the lowest effective dose, then begin other skillful techniques and see if you can decrease the dose.
Don't avoid pain medication. If you wait until the pain is very severe, the medication will have less effect than if you take the medication at or before the onset of pain, and then you may need to take more.
- * If medication sensitive (you get more side effects from medication than benefits), work on your liver. Improving the liver's ability to detoxify/clear medications can make it easier to tolerate necessary pain meds.

Eat a liver supportive, anti-inflammatory diet. High carb foods, sugar, and refined flour products over-load both the pancreas and the liver. Keep blood sugar steady. Every time blood sugar spikes and drops, it creates another inflammatory burst in the whole body.

- Pace your activity to avoid needing to rest because the pain has gotten too bad -- rest is **not** an effective pain medication at that point. **Stop before you have to stop. Rest preventively.** If you need to lie down half of the day, be up for half of each hour, then lie down for the other half of each hour. Gradually increase activity and decrease rest as pain levels allow.
- If you have been sedentary and have become deconditioned, it will take time for your strength to increase. Also, you may find that you are sore for the first two weeks. Understand that this is normal, though bothersome, and persevere - **it's worth it!!**
- Do relaxation practices regularly, especially deep abdominal breathing. Relaxation tapes with hypnosis or guided imagery (imagine being in a pain free place), body scan or progressive relaxation can help make rest times more effective, especially if you sometimes feel anxious or agitated when you lie down. **MBSR - Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Pain Management** classes, taught in 8 week series, can help you learn to shift from high intensity reactivity to lower intensity, situation-appropriate response to stress and pain.
- Draw on spiritual resources. Remember that fear creates tension and tension increases pain. Our bodies change as we age and as illnesses progress. Some changes you notice are simply the normal changes that happen with age, some

are in response to medication or the disease process. Holding our bodies, ourselves, our families in the shelter of prayer, meditation, faith and trust allows us to open and relax rather than tense and worry. This fosters healing.

- Eat regularly, as low blood sugar decreases muscle strength, increases tension and anxiety, and aggravates pain. Get enough sleep. Sleep loss can increase pain and inflammation.
- Take time for things you enjoy from time spent on less important tasks. **Decide what not to do.** Especially if your life is changing because of your health or pain, let yourself surrender some roles, goals or standards so that you have more time for what is most important.
- Accept appropriate support from others. When possible, let others do routine tasks so you have time and energy for those things only you can do for the ones you love -- like listening to them, loving them, sharing with them.
- Make time for things you enjoy. Remember what you liked to do before, and make time for those things you still can do. Take time to notice when you are doing things you enjoy.
- Remember that depression and anxiety are caused by pain, not the other way round. Depression and anxiety can interfere with the ability to recover and/or control pain. It is important to treat both the pain and the depression or anxiety.
- Challenge automatic thoughts: For example, if you're thinking, because you can't do things that you used to, that you are worthless, remember that you still have value to your family. If you think you have no control over your pain, that you can't make it go away, remember that there are things you can do to control some aspects of the pain. If you think you can't do anything any more, notice the things that you can do.
- Exercise to improve physical fitness as much as possible, as this will both help relieve pain and keep you strong enough to do what you've decided matters most. **Remember that with most chronic pain, movement doesn't cause more damage (unlike in acute pain).** Begin very gently and increase gradually.

Exercise improves strength and mobility, range of motion techniques increase flexibility and decrease stiffness. Muscle strengthening decreases arthritis and back pain. Bone strengthening techniques keep bones mineralized and improve balance. All of these activities enhance coordination and agility, helping to prevent falls.

- Rubbing often helps pain go away -- it stimulates large nerve fibers that help inhibit pain. Massage helps circulation, and touch soothes the troubled heart.
- Reach out to others with what you've learned.
- Communicate openly and assertively. Everyone's going to give you advice. Find a team you trust and work with them. Beware of doctor hopping. Use your pain activity diary to help your team know what works and what doesn't.