



What is chronic pain?

This is an information leaflet for people who have been told they have chronic pain including chronic low back pain and chronic widespread pain, also known as Fibromyalgia.



This will explain more about chronic pain, how this is different from acute pain and a bit more about how chronic pain is managed. We know that understanding chronic pain can help you manage it better.

ACUTE PAIN AND CHRONIC PAIN ARE DIFFERENT

Most people think of pain as acute injury related pain, meaning there is damage to the body but this is not always the case.

Acute pain from an injury such as a burn or a broken leg, is caused by your nerves releasing chemicals to alert your body to potential harm or pain; this usually lasts a short time and can be managed with appropriate pain relief or modifying activity.

For example, if we touch something hot, the pain that we get is a useful message which tells us to take our hand away and may make us afraid of touching hot things in the future.

These nerves are supposed to switch off when the body has healed...but sometimes they don't.



Chronic pain

Chronic pain is different, both in terms of what happens to the body, and what it's like to live with it. Here is how some people describe it:

'It's the additional factors. It's not just the pain. The pain in itself, I suppose, can be managed, but it's all the things that come with it'

'my brain works at a hundred miles an hour, but my body doesn't let me do that'.

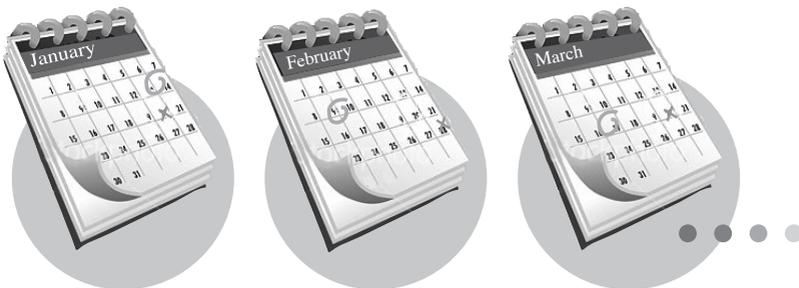
'this isn't fair, you know, this isn't fair and I didn't ask for this'

'They've never actually come back and said this is what is wrong with you and this is why you're getting chronic pain.'

'To me I feel like normal life, has ceased..... it's like it's only a dream.'

'I get up in the morning and it's the same routine day after day. I feel like I'm a hamster in a wheel. It's the same thing all the time. It doesn't really vary. It's quite a staid life really because of my pain and that, because you're not out, mixing'

Chronic pain lasts after tissues have healed or because of no injury at all. After we have had pain for three months it is often called chronic pain or persistent pain and this can continue for years. Sometimes the way the body processes pain changes biologically; this can lead to the pain being long term, continuous and sometimes widespread such as in Fibromyalgia.



We know once we have had pain for a while it is unlikely that this will simply go. This is because of the changes in our nervous system and the way the body processes pain. Chronic pain is unlikely to be the result of ongoing damage or harm.

There isn't a specific test for chronic pain (like the doctor taking your blood pressure), and X-Rays and MRI scans won't tell you how much pain you are in. This is upsetting for some people because they can sometimes feel abandoned or let down by healthcare staff. It also means that other people can't see your pain. Lack of a 'specific' diagnosis is common in chronic pain.

Chronic pain is surprisingly common. Around 1 in 5 people in Scotland have chronic pain to some degree with about 1 in 20 having more severe chronic pain.

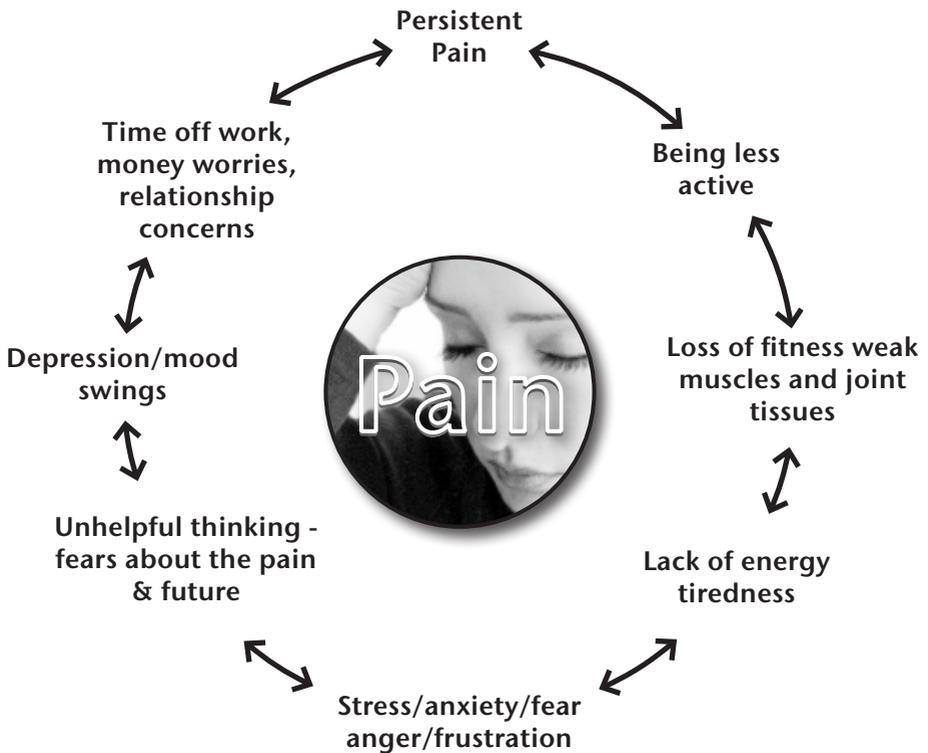
We know that chronic pain changes how our pain processing systems work. Our pain systems are part of central nervous system processing. These systems become much more sensitive and better at telling you about pain. This is brought about by changes in the systems and is not caused by something specific such as an individual damaged disc, nerve, or muscle. However, this certainly does not mean that the pain is all in your mind, although it does involve the brain processing systems!

It's a bit like having a fire alarm that has gone off, perhaps being triggered by an injury to the body and it just keeps ringing, even when the fire is put out; the body has healed but the pain sensations are still activated.



CHRONIC PAIN IS A VICIOUS CIRCLE

Chronic pain can become a vicious circle for some people. As your pain continues, your ability to do every day tasks can become limited and muscles can become out of condition. Stresses, anxiety and tension can also become more of a problem, which in turn can make the pain feel worse.



MANAGEMENT FOR CHRONIC PAIN

The goal is to turn people into expert managers of their chronic pain, to regain control and have a better quality of life.

‘Chronic pain has’ been recognised as a long term health condition by the Scottish Government since 2008 and this means we need to think about long term management, rather than a short term approach where people often feel they are passed ‘from pillar to post’ and end up on an increasing amount of tablets.

If we don’t know how to manage the pain, the pain can often manage us, making us feel it is out of control. The most effective management of Chronic pain is usually achieved with medication options and developing your own approach to management with input from professionals. Management often includes learning and understanding how chronic pain works within your own body which can help you to identify activities and develop daily plans that you can achieve, recognising what is important for you and possible limitations. It is helpful, but can often be challenging to find the level of activity and exercise that is right for you. Managing the way the pain can affect your mood and motivation is also an important part of management.

Individual Appointments & Classes

Please speak with your physiotherapist, GP or pharmacist about what might be the best option for you.



WHAT DO PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC PAIN SAY ABOUT MANAGEMENT?

Here are what some people have said about management, after they have finished:

'I get more stuff done slowly in stages that I feel comfortable with and then I feel quite pleased with myself cos then I've done it so I'm slightly happier in a way with how things are going'

'Before, I couldn't accept it. I was always pushing myself..... Making it worse, always in pain, always miserable.'

'yeah I'm still in pain but I'm more relaxed because I'm not constantly looking around for a solution to my pain, you know. I'm not wondering... oh, I wonder if anybody's discovered the magic pill today.'

'if I'm panicking about something or if the pain's just too intense and I'm getting all panicky inside, I'm like 'aaaah' and 'right, breathe, breathe' until I calm myself down again and I didn't know how to do that before.'

'learning the techniques, like the breathing and, 'calm down, slow down, pace yourself'..... I'm really pacing myself now. I've stopped beating myself up now cos I've learned to accept it. I think well, it's not really my faultI'm happier now..... I'm more settled now. Before I was never sleeping but now I am.'



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Pain Association Scotland

Pain Association Scotland offers self management training to people with chronic pain. It offers three groups in Lanarkshire which are held on a monthly basis and cover a range of topics. The groups are currently held in Wishaw, Coatbridge and East Kilbride.

You can also call them on 01738 629 503 or 0800 783 6059
<http://www.painassociation.com/>

Health talk online *(visit the 'chronic pain' section)*

This site has a range of video clips of interviews with information, opinion and personal experience. It includes a doctor giving a medical explanation of chronic pain and also people with chronic pain talking about their own experiences of a variety of topics such as coming to terms with pain' and 'pain management approaches: exercise and activity'.

(You can also read transcripts of the interviews)

<http://www.healthtalk.org>

Mood juice *(visit the 'chronic pain' section)*

This site has lots of helpful advice and information on managing mood and chronic pain.

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

Pain Toolkit

This website has lots of helpful online information about pain management and chronic pain which is easy to access on the internet.

<https://www.paintoolkit.org/>