

Components of Chronic Pain Management

Activity

Being active can help reduce pain levels. The intensity and style of activity which will promote healing will depend on the cause of pain.

Treatment tips

Meaningful activity will help improve quality of life and reduce pain. Occupational therapists can help adapt activities, clarify treatment options and expectations, and provide coaching for self-management techniques. Proper body mechanics, and neuromuscular reeducation will increase self-efficacy, and reduce strain on body structures. Muscle tension reduction training will help reduce tension in the muscles and reduce pain. Pacing activities will help to minimize pain and improve endurance in daily activities. Generally, moderate level exercises are good for chronic pain. This can include, walking, swimming, stretching etc.

Risk/benefit: Deconditioning may result from lack of activity, and this can worsen pain. Although some pain will occur with new movement, movement will help pain in the long run.

Precautions: The condition which is causing the pain must be considered to determine what type of activity is appropriate, and ensure the condition is not made worse by activity. Consult with your doctor.

Things to watch for: Track pain levels during activity with a pain diary.

Expected outcomes: Pain levels should decline with moderate, meaningful activity.



Sleep

Sleep is linked with both physical and mental health. When we don't get enough sleep, this can worsen pain, which can then further impact sleep.

Treatment tips: Make a sleep routine so that you go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day to support circadian rhythms. Take an hour or so to start winding down before going to bed.

Mood

Chronic pain often leads to fear, anxiety, and avoidance behaviors. By addressing mood, you can minimize negative emotions and behaviors which worsen pain.

Treatment tips: Build confidence through a tangible care plan. Some treatment approaches for mood include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), and proactive problem solving.

Risk/ benefit: Find a therapist that understands your specific situation and who you can feel comfortable opening up to.

Things to watch for: Having a journal can help bring awareness to negative thinking and reduce its impact on mood.

Expected outcomes: By addressing mood, acceptance and self-efficacy will increase, more adaptive belief patterns will be established, and there will be a greater ability to take proactive steps to manage pain.



Social

About: Isolation feeds pain by wiring the brain in a way that worsens pain. Connection and physical touch have a calming effect on the nervous system and may reduce pain levels.

Treatment tips and why: Communication skills training can help foster social connections to improve quality of life with pain. Support and education can be provided to reduce stigma around pain.



Nutrition and Medications

Nutrition should be addressed to ensure inflammation is minimized, and necessary nutrients are being ingested.

Medications should be balanced with other non-pharmaceutical modalities.

Treatment tips and why: Certain classes of medication will be appropriate for specific kinds of pain. Medical history also impacts effectiveness and risk vs. benefit for certain medications. Consult with your provider.

Risk/benefit: Start slow, titrate dose, maintain regular visits with provider.

Precautions/ contraindications: Be aware of side effects

Modalities

These tools and techniques can provide temporary pain relief and support your treatment goals

E-stim (Tens)

Ultrasound

Heat/cold

Myofascial release



Flare ups

Flare ups may happen. It can be discouraging, but with some tips, the frequency and intensity of the flare up can be minimized. Eliminating all pain may not be realistic however, becoming an active participant in your own pain management can result in less flare ups and better quality of life.

Tips

Manage stress

Take it easy during flare ups, use modalities to take the edge off

Eat well

Keep moving, but pace yourself

Take medications as prescribed

Take notes during the flare ups to be able to identify when they are starting and be proactive in treating them. Know when to seek help.



Resources

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