

Pain that tends to last longer than 6 months can be termed chronic.

What to look for

The condition may include weakness, numbness, tingling, or other sensations, along with sleeping difficulties, a lack of energy, and depression. Some common forms of chronic pain are:

- this type of pain can include headaches, muscle, back or joint pain that is enduring and debilitating or uncomfortable.

This type of pain can be sporadic, continuous, uncomfortable or Chronic pain can be mild or agonising.

The areas described above are the most common, however chronic pain can also include Achilles problems, sinus, other forms of degenerative joint disease, carpal tunnel syndrome, and localised pain.

The state of your mind has a lot to do with your perception of pain. And your state of mind is influenced by the surroundings you find yourself in and your attitudes as well. The psychological effect pain can have on us is substantial. Persistent severe pain can erode our natural threshold to pain and cause our personality to alter as a result. We can tend to perceive the pain as worse than it actually is or that it is becoming worse and worse. The immune system may also become affected adversely from persistent pain.

Causes

The causes of chronic pain are many and varied, some possible causes are as follows:-

- aging (may affect bones and joints)
- nerve damage and injuries that fail to heal properly.
- Back pain
- being overweight
- curvature of the spine
- to a traumatic injury
- or to no obvious physical cause.

Disease can also be the underlying cause of chronic pain.

Sometimes it is a very difficult thing to pinpoint the exact cause of the pain as any possibility alludes healers and doctors. A process of elimination is then commenced to find the cause.

Traditional Treatment

People who suffer from chronic pain may need professional help.

The aim in many cases is not only to alleviate pain but also to teach the chronic sufferer how to come to terms with pain and function in spite of it. The first step in many cases is to wean the patient from a dependence on pain killing medications.

Other methods used by pain specialists include relaxation techniques to control brain-wave activity, behaviour-modification therapy to revise the way pain is perceived, acupuncture, hypnotherapy, meditation, and other forms of alternative therapy.

Over-the-counter pain killers can control milder cases of musculoskeletal pain and reduce inflammation.

Your doctor may prescribe stronger drugs if these others do not help.

Lifestyle

You should take some time out when you feel the pain, however too much rest is also not going to do your problem much good - it can actually make your muscles weaker and cause more pain eventually.

Research has shown that regular exercise can diminish pain in the long run by improving muscle tone, strength, and flexibility and also release the body's natural pain killers to help you. Try low impact types of exercise.

Visualisation may be another worthwhile pain-controlling technique - seek out places in your area that teach this very worthwhile technique.

Hypnotherapy and self-hypnosis may help you block or transform pain through refocussing techniques.

Relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga are also very helpful for chronic pain sufferers.

Dietary Considerations

Certain supplements have been known to help tremendously with chronic pain. These are:- DL-Phenylalanine (amino acid), Valerian, white willow bark.

See the entry for rheumatoid arthritis and allergies for dietary considerations and foods to eat and avoid.

At-Home Remedies

Remember "RICE"

R - Rest

I - Apply ice to the affected area

C - Compress the area

E - Elevate the area.

- Take herbal remedies suggested by a qualified herbalist
- Do some low-impact exercise.

When to seek further professional advice

- your pain continues for several weeks and doesn't respond to over-the-counter products or rest.