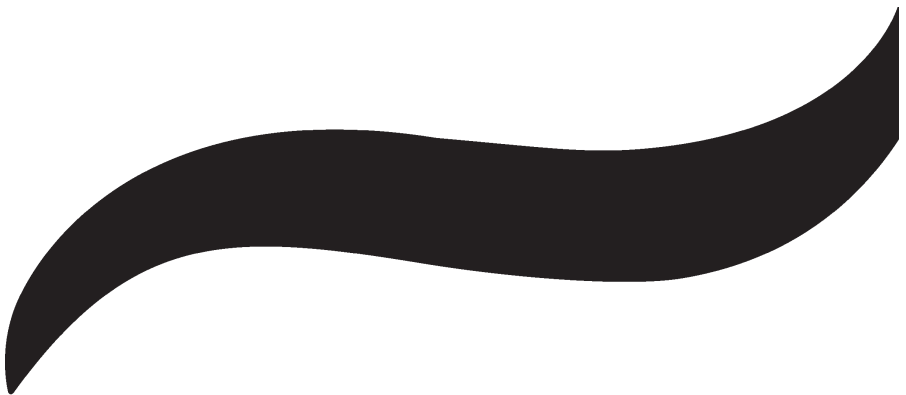




Living with Chronic Pain

Information for patients
Prescribing Management Team
Kirklands Hospital



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 used to experiencing.

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?

People who have chronic pain often do less activity overall and as a result they can lose some physical fitness. This means that even a small increase in activity can sometimes increase your pain.

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 these types of diagnostic and investigative tests.

THE EFFECTS OF CHRONIC PAIN

We know that chronic pain contribute or lead to social, family and financial problems as 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 every day. 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, pharmacist or pain specialist 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. Take things gradually and don't give up!
- ❖ **Keep up hobbies and interests** - this can often seem impossible when you have pain, but most 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.

USEFUL CONTACTS

The British Pain Society - www.britishpainsociety.org

Steps for stress - NHS inform is Scotland's national health information service. Visit the Healthy Living section for advice www.nhsinform.scot

Information and support on pain - www.painconcern.org.uk

We hope you found this information leaflet helpful. This information is not intended to replace your Doctor's advice. If you have any comments about the content, please let us know. This can be done by filling in the comment section, and sending it to the Prescribing Management Team at the address listed below, or by email.

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This publication is adapted with the kind agreement of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Pain Managed Clinical Network and approved for use in NHS Lanarkshire.

COMMENTS:

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NHS Lanarkshire General
Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

NHS inform - The national health information service for Scotland.

www.nhsinform.co.uk

Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the NHS Lanarkshire General Enquiry Line on 0300 3030 243 or e-mail info@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk



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