

Chronic Pain



Why does it hurt?

We all experience pain from time to time. Pain is our body's natural response to an illness or injury. Although pain is generally considered to be an unpleasant and distressing sensation, pain is

important to keep our bodies healthy. If we did not experience pain, we may not recognize the presence of infection and delay getting proper care. Or, we may continue to aggravate an injury and cause further damage to our tissue or bones. There are two different types of pain: acute pain and chronic pain.

Acute Pain

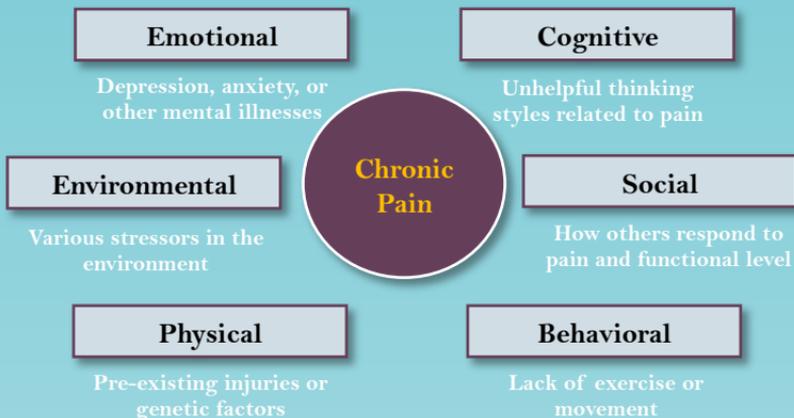
- Results from an illness or injury
- Lasts less than 3 months and goes away when the illness or injury resolves
- Generally responds to typical pain medication or supportive therapies (i.e., physical therapy)

Chronic Pain

- Cause may be unknown and not the direct result of an illness or injury
- Persists for longer than 3 months
- Does not respond to typical pain medication or intervention

How does chronic pain develop?

Unfortunately, medical and scientific research has not been able to identify a clear reason as to why some people develop chronic pain and others do not. However, it is well-accepted that a variety of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, social, and environmental factors are involved in its development and maintenance. Examples of risk factors include:



Chronic Pain

What are common chronic pain conditions?

- Fibromyalgia
- Functional Abdominal Pain
- Back and neck pain
- Headaches/Migraines
- Chronic Pain Syndrome
- Complex Regional Pain Syndrome
- Amplified Pain Syndrome
- Orthopedic pain

How is chronic pain treated?

Given the complexity of chronic pain, a multidisciplinary approach to treatment is recommended. This ideally includes certain medical specialists, physical therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

How can psychologists help with chronic pain?

Chronic pain can impact all areas of a person's life, making it difficult to function in day to day activities. Kids may have trouble going to school because of pain and feel stressed out about keeping up with their schoolwork and peer relationships. Similarly, it may impact participation in preferred activities, which can lead to feelings of depression and social isolation.

Even though the origin of pain may be in the body, the *perception* of pain occurs in the brain. Therefore, by addressing how people think about their pain and changing behaviors that may be reinforcing the experience of pain, people can often gain a better quality of life and drastically increase their function, even if their level of pain remains unchanged. Psychologists can also help you develop effective coping and relaxation strategies to “quiet” the nervous system and minimize the perception of pain.

Who do I contact to find out more?

Referrals for pain psychology services can be made by your pediatrician, specialty care doctor, mental health professional, or by the family directly. If interested, please contact us as listed below.



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