

What is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain causes discomfort, stresses the body, and can interfere with work and daily activities. Its physical effects can include tense muscles, limited movement, low energy, and changes in appetite.

Chronic pain can also affect our relationships and emotional health by causing low self-esteem, anger, and depression. Untreated acute pain can become chronic pain. Chronic pain is commonly associated with headache, arthritis, cancer, nerve pain, back pain, and fibromyalgia.

Chronic pain lasts more than 3 months or after normal healing from surgery or an injury is complete. Sometimes chronic pain occurs without a past injury or damage.



Talk to Your Doctor!

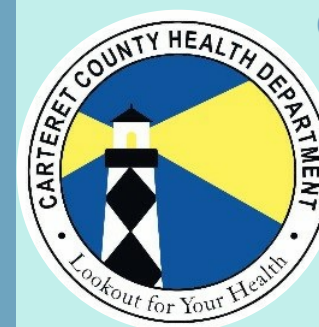


Here are some questions to ask your doctor:

- What kind of relief can I expect from this treatment?
- How long should I expect this pain to last?
- How long will it take for this treatment to start working?
- What should I do if the pain changes or gets worse?
- What should I do if this treatment isn't making my pain level manageable?
- What can I do to manage my pain besides taking medication?
- How much exercise or physical therapy is healthy?
- Would stress reduction or counseling help?
- Are there any possible side effects or bad interactions between this treatment and other medications I take?
- What should I do if I start noticing side effects or if my behavior changes?
- Are there conditions or behaviors that may raise my risk of opioid overdose or misuse?
- Do I need to make other changes to my behavior-including driving habits or drinking and other drug use-while taking this medication?
- What is naloxone and should I have some?
- How can my friends or family help me manage my pain and treatment?



Understanding and Managing Chronic Pain



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Types of Chronic Pain and Appropriate Treatment

There are two goals in chronic pain treatment—1) providing immediate care so people can return to everyday life, and 2) finding long-term ways to manage and reduce chronic pain. Finding the right combination of physical changes, behavior changes, and medication can provide necessary relief and help manage future pain.



Nociceptive Pain

Nociceptive pain is related to tissue damage from injury or swelling in the bones, muscles, or organs. (Example: Rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis)

Neuropathic Pain

Neuropathic pain is related to the nervous system. It feels like burning, tingling, or pins-and-needles. (Example: Diabetes-related nerve pain and pain after stroke.)

Sensory Hypersensitivity

Sensory hypersensitivity is pain without identifiable nerve or tissue damage. Someone with this pain may feel normal touch as painful, or feel sensations as more painful than usual. (Example: headaches and fibromyalgia.)



Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions

Physical Therapy

This includes stretching and strengthening exercises and can help relieve pain and improve strength and flexibility.

Low-Impact Exercises

Activities such as walking, biking, yoga, and swimming can also help with strength and flexibility, and help reduce stress. Always talk to your doctor about exercise to reduce pain.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy can teach you new techniques, like lifting and carrying heavy objects, so that you don't make your pain worse.

Behavioral Therapy

Stress, depression, and anxiety can make pain worse. Mental health treatment can help manage factors that contribute to your pain level. Taking care of your mental health can also prevent misuse of pain medication.

Lifestyle Changes

Some examples of lifestyle changes that could help manage pain would be to quit smoking and to have regular and restful sleep.

Stress Management

Stretching, exercise, meditation, and enjoyable hobbies can reduce your stress and keep your mind off your pain symptoms.