

MANAGING CHRONIC PAIN

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES, AND
CAREGIVERS



READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- What Chronic Pain is.
- How to Recognize Chronic Pain.
- Strategies to Prevent and Manage Chronic Pain.



**Sinai
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Healthy Ageing
and Geriatrics



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WHAT IS CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain is a long-term form of pain that persists beyond the expected time of healing. Typically, if pain lasts longer than 12 weeks, it can be considered chronic pain.

HOW COMMON IS CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain is a common issue worldwide and in Canada, which becomes more common with age. It is estimated that one in five Canadians live with chronic pain. Over 50% of Canadian older adults aged 65 and older are estimated to have chronic pain.

WHY ARE OLDER ADULTS VULNERABLE TO CHRONIC PAIN?

While older adults are more likely to suffer from chronic pain, it is not a normal part of ageing. However, many chronic diseases that older adults are more likely to be diagnosed with are also associated with chronic pain, such as arthritis, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and Parkinson's disease.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR CHRONIC PAIN?

While being diagnosed with a chronic health condition can put you at increased risk of experiencing chronic pain, there are other risk factors as well. These include:



- Being aged 65 and older.
- Being female.
- Being overweight.



- Having a lower income.
- Having a lower education.



- Using tobacco or smoking.
- Vaping.



- History of injury.
- Existing health problems.



- History of strenuous work.
- Work-related stress.



- Experiencing childhood trauma.
- Experiencing depression or anxiety.

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHRONIC PAIN?

Pain can look different in different people. For example, it can feel like aching, burning, stabbing or throbbing, and can affect a person's physical, mental and/or emotional well-being.

Some common types of pain among older adults are:



- Joint Pain from Arthritis



- Pain following Surgery



- Back Pain



- Cancer Pain



- Leg Pain



- Pain following a Stroke



- Pain following a case of Shingles



- Post-Polio Pain

WHAT CAN CHRONIC PAIN LOOK LIKE IN OLDER ADULTS?

Chronic pain can lead to many negative health outcomes in older adults. For example, chronic pain in older adults is associated with disability, reduced mobility, avoidance of physical activity, falls, depression, anxiety, sleep impairment and isolation. Additionally, older adults with chronic pain may experience:

- Fatigue, which can lead to impatience or a loss of motivation.
- Poor sleep.
- Withdrawal from activity.
- Mood changes.
- Depression.
- A weakened immune system.

Many of the symptoms and negative outcomes associated with chronic pain can also make it worse.

Pain can occasionally be a sign of a new illness. Tell your primary care provider if the pain lasts longer than reasonably expected, or if you are experiencing any of the following signs:

- Pain following a fall.
- Pain associated with a fever.
- Pain that wakes you up from sleep.
- New headaches.
- Sudden unexplained weight loss.

HOW CAN OLDER ADULTS PREVENT CHRONIC PAIN?

Even though chronic pain may be the result of a health condition or treatment, there are some steps older adults can take to prevent it. Exercising regularly, managing health issues as quickly as possible, reducing stress and eating a balanced diet can all help prevent chronic pain in older adults.

Chronic pain following a case of shingles is more common in older adults. This can be prevented by getting the shingles vaccine. Speak to your health care provider to see if this vaccine is a good option for you.



HOW CAN OLDER ADULTS BETTER MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain can be managed at home with exercise, regular sleep, and support from health care providers. Follow these tips to address your pain:



TALK TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Keep in contact with your health care provider to ensure your chronic diseases and mental health needs are met to help manage your chronic pain.



REGULAR EXERCISE & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Exercising regularly can help manage chronic pain by making your bones and muscles stronger and joints more flexible. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program.



MAINTAIN A REGULAR SLEEP SCHEDULE

Keep a regular schedule for when you go to bed and wake up each day. Avoid naps and having caffeine late in the day and in the evening.

The next few pages of this pamphlet will give you greater detail on how you can further better manage your chronic pain in the above three areas.

DISCUSSING YOUR PAIN AND OTHER HEALTH ISSUES WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

It is important to discuss your pain with your health care provider, so that they can understand how to best address it.

Describe your pain to your health care provider as accurately as possible. Since pain can affect people differently, it is important to describe the quality of your pain. Using words such as achy, tender, burning, cramping, sharp, dull, stabbing and tingling to describe your pain can help your health care provider understand it better. They may also ask you to describe your pain using a 0-10 scale, with 10 being the worst pain you can imagine, to better understand how it evolves over time and how severely it is affecting you or responding to various therapies being offered.

Depending on how severe your pain is, your doctor may prescribe treatment using physiotherapy, medications, psychotherapy or a combination of treatments.

Chronic and mental health conditions can also make your chronic pain feel worse. Keep in contact with your health care provider to ensure all your physical, mental and emotional health needs are being met.

REGULAR EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN HELP MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN

Regular exercise and physical activity are beneficial to staying physically and mentally healthy as we age and can help manage chronic pain by making your bones and muscles stronger and joints more flexible.

Older adults should aim to exercise for 30 minutes per day. There are many types of exercises or daily activities you can incorporate into your routine to stay healthy and active:

- Walking.
- Light jogging.
- Dancing classes.
- Water aerobics.
- Chair exercises.
- Yoga.
- Tai Chi.
- Stretching exercises.
- Gardening.
- Walking your dog.
- Taking the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator.



For more information, refer to our [**“Staying Active As You Age”**](#) pamphlet.

Always check with your health care provider before starting a new exercise program to make sure this is the best type of exercise for you.

MAINTAINING A REGULAR SLEEP SCHEDULE

Pain can make it difficult to sleep through the night. A lack of quality sleep can affect your energy, emotions, and overall health. As much as is possible, try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, including on weekends. If you are in enough pain at night that it limits your ability to sleep, talk to your primary health care provider. Exercising during the day can help you fall asleep at night. Some other tips to get a restful sleep are:



- Avoid large meals and drinking fluids a few hours before bedtime.
- Limit or eliminate alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine.
- Exercise regularly but not within 2 hours of your bedtime.
- Get adequate exposure to bright light during the day.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and cool to keep comfortable throughout the night.
- If it helps, use a soothing noise (e.g. a fan, other appliance, “white noise” machine).
- Remove electronics from the room.
- Develop a sleep ritual (same routine each night before going to bed).

For more information, refer to our **“Managing Sleep in Older Adults”** pamphlet.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

REHAB AND WELLBEING CENTRE AT MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL

The Rehab and Wellbeing Centre offers a mix of therapeutic and rehabilitation services to help individuals manage pain.



416-619-5546



www.mountsinai.on.ca/wellbeing

TORONTO ACADEMIC PAIN MEDICINE INSTITUTE (TAPMI)

The Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute is the hub for chronic pain management services in Toronto. It works to understand your condition and connect you with



416-323-6269



www.tapmipain.ca

THE WASSER PAIN MANAGEMENT CENTRE

The Wasser Pain Management Centre provides patient care, education and research in the area of chronic, disabling pain disorders.



416-586-5997, option #2



www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/pain_management

RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

- Living Longer, Living Well – Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Staying Active As You Age

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Managing Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease & Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing and Managing Diabetes in Older Persons
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

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