

Understanding long-term pain

What you can do for better pain management

Understanding your pain will help you manage it

Long-term pain, pain that lasts more than three months, can have a big effect on daily life.

It can make it harder to work, sleep, and take care of responsibilities. It can also worsen your mood and make it challenging to take part in activities and do things with the people you enjoy.

The good news is there's a lot you can do to help manage your pain. Research has shown that certain things can help retrain your brain's response to pain.



Focus on movement and activity

You might worry that physical activity will make your pain worse. But movement is likely to lessen your pain.

- Physical activity helps ease muscle stiffness and improves your mobility.
- It can also help lift your mood and help you sleep better.

If you feel pain or discomfort when beginning physical activity, remember that you are sore but safe.

- This means that feeling pain does not mean you are causing harm.
- When coming back to physical activity, it is normal to have some pain or discomfort.
- Remember to start low and slow. If you slowly increase your activity over the next few months, your pain should decrease, and you'll be able to get back to things you enjoy.
- Joining a fitness class or working with a physical therapist can help you increase physical activity slowly and safely. Gentle yoga, stretching, and tai chi are also good options for low-impact activities.
- If pain is severe, sharp, or persistent with physical activity, talk to your doctor or physical therapist.

Did you know?

Pain doesn't always equal harm

- Pain comes from a natural response in the brain.
- The brain makes sense of what is happening and creates a pain response to protect you.
- All people experience this pain response differently.
- Sometimes the brain gets so good at producing pain that it doesn't stop — even after the cause of the pain has healed.



Work on improving your mood and outlook

Pain and mood are closely connected. Lifting your mood can actually help your pain. Here are some things that you can do to help improve your mood and outlook on life.

- Learn to reflect on and reframe negative thoughts.
- Take part in activities you enjoy.
- Spend time with friends, family, or social groups.
- Join a support group with people who are also managing chronic pain.
- Learn to relax and reduce stress by using techniques like deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness.
- Ask your doctor about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which helps stop negative thoughts, reduce stress, and ease pain.



Take a class online

Better Choices, Better Health can help you learn to better manage your pain. The online course is available at no cost. During the 6-week program, you will set goals and learn tools to help you meet your goals, manage stress, communicate with friends and family, and get better sleep. For more information call the Kaiser Permanente Resource Line toll free at 1-800-992-2279 or visit <https://enroll-kpwa1.selfmanage.org/>.



Get enough sleep, but not too much

Getting restful sleep can help you feel energized and more active. It can also help you feel more social and reduce your cravings for unhealthy foods.



Decrease your use of pain medicine

Sometimes pain medicine does more harm than good. It could help to slowly cut down on the amount you're taking. Cutting down on pain medicine over time is sometimes called a taper. People often worry that they will not be able to manage their pain with less medicine. The good news is that most people actually feel better after they taper medicine and work with their doctor to find new and better ways to treat their pain.

Did you know?

When people understand their pain, it can decrease the pain

- Your thoughts and actions affect your experience of pain.
- By changing your thoughts and actions, you can slowly turn down the volume on your pain.
- Stress and pain are closely related.
- If you try to release your stress and change the way you respond to it, this will likely help reduce your pain.
- You can change your pain, but it is a process. Be patient with yourself!

Want to learn more?

- Talk to your doctor about ways to improve your pain and your overall health.
- Check out the Oregon Pain Guidance [Pain Education Toolkit](#)

