

Managing Chronic Pain



More than 130 million Americans suffer from chronic, or frequently occurring, pain. Chronic pain creates both physical and psychological problems that affect whether a person can engage in meaningful activities each day. Pain can decrease a person's strength, coordination, and independence in addition to causing stress that may lead to depression.

With the help of occupational therapy, people with chronic pain can learn to manage the physical and psychological effects and lead active and productive lives. Many people with chronic pain already have received treatment with medication, surgery, heat, cold, nerve stimulation, and massage. What many have not yet learned is how management of daily activities and lifestyle can contribute to successful, long-term coping with pain.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Identify** specific activities or behaviors that aggravate pain and suggest alternatives.
- **Teach** methods for decreasing the frequency and duration of painful episodes.
- **Implement** therapy interventions that may decrease dependence on or use of pain medications.
- **Facilitate** the development of better function for daily activities at work and home.
- **Collaborate** with the client's team of health care professionals, such as physicians, physical therapists, psychiatrists, and psychologists, to determine the best course of treatment and intervention.
- **Recommend** and teach the client how to use adaptive equipment to decrease pain while performing tasks such as reaching, dressing, bathing, and perform household chores.

What can a person with chronic pain do?

- **Develop** and practice a lifestyle based on wellness, which includes plenty of rest, exercise, healthy nutrition, and maintaining a positive attitude.
- **Practice** techniques to decrease the intensity of pain.
- **Organize** a daily routine with personal pain management goals, such as eliminating or modifying activities that use a lot of energy and implementing body mechanics that move the body in ways that are less likely to aggravate pain.
- **Exercise** to increase strength and flexibility and reduce pain.
- **Practice** relaxation techniques that calm the mind and reduce tensions that aggravate pain.

Need more information?

Chronic pain is a serious problem that should not go untreated. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about pain management, practitioners are available through most hospitals, community clinics, and medical centers.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children with a broad range of physical, developmental, and psychological conditions. Practitioners also help clients in wellness techniques that may prevent injury and disease. Contact your local health officials for more information.