

# **Chronic Pain Syndrome Patient & Caregiver Education Worksheet**

**Understand Chronic Pain. Track changes.  
Prepare for your next appointment.**

A practical resource for patients and caregivers.

**Aging Parent Resource Hub**  
[www.agingparentresourcehub.net](http://www.agingparentresourcehub.net)

# Understanding Chronic Pain Syndrome

## What Is Chronic Pain?

Pain is generally considered **chronic when it continues or recurs for longer than about three months**. Chronic pain can begin with an injury, surgery, illness, nerve problem, arthritis, or another medical condition. Sometimes the original cause of the pain improves, but the pain continues.

Chronic pain is real. It is **not simply "in your head," and experiencing ongoing pain does not mean you are weak or exaggerating your symptoms**.

When pain continues for a long time, the nervous system can become more sensitive to pain signals. This can sometimes cause the body to respond more strongly to sensations that previously would not have been as painful.

## How Chronic Pain Can Affect You

Living with ongoing pain can affect many areas of life, including:

- Sleep
- Energy
- Physical activity
- Mood
- Concentration
- Relationships
- Work or daily activities
- Appetite
- Independence
- Overall quality of life

Pain and stress can also influence one another. Poor sleep and increased stress may make pain feel worse, while persistent pain can make it harder to sleep or cope with stress.

This does not mean that the pain isn't physical. It means that pain is influenced by multiple systems in the body.

## Understanding Your Pain

It can be helpful to identify patterns in your pain.

### My Pain

**Where do I hurt?**

**When did the pain begin?**

**What does the pain feel like?**

- ☐ Aching
- ☐ Burning
- ☐ Sharp
- ☐ Stabbing
- ☐ Throbbing
- ☐ Tingling
- ☐ Numbness
- ☐ Pressure
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

My pain level today (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_

My usual pain level: \_\_\_\_\_

My worst pain: \_\_\_\_\_

## Understanding Your Pain

### What Makes My Pain Better?

- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Movement
- ☐ Heat
- ☐ Cold
- ☐ Medication
- ☐ Stretching
- ☐ Physical therapy
- ☐ Massage
- ☐ Relaxation
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### What Makes My Pain Worse?

- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Standing
- ☐ Sitting
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Poor sleep
- ☐ Weather changes
- ☐ Certain activities
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Chronic Pain & Sleep**

Pain can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep. Unfortunately, poor sleep can also increase sensitivity to pain.

Talk with your healthcare provider if pain is regularly interfering with your sleep.

Helpful habits may include:

- Keeping a consistent sleep schedule
- Creating a comfortable sleep environment
- Limiting caffeine later in the day
- Using relaxation techniques before bed
- Following your provider's recommendations for managing nighttime pain

If you regularly wake up because of pain, tell your healthcare provider.

## Movement Is Often Part of Pain Management

When you are hurting, it can be tempting to avoid movement completely. However, depending on the cause of your pain, **gradually increasing appropriate physical activity can help maintain strength, flexibility, and function.**

The right type of activity depends on your medical conditions and physical abilities.

Your healthcare provider or physical therapist can help determine what is safe for you.

Possible activities may include:

- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Stretching
- ☐ Strengthening exercises
- ☐ Water exercise
- ☐ Physical therapy
- ☐ Chair exercises
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### My provider's recommendations:

Do not push through severe or significantly worsening pain without discussing it with your healthcare team.

## **Physical Therapy**

Physical therapy may help some people with chronic pain improve:

- Strength
- Flexibility
- Balance
- Mobility
- Body mechanics
- Ability to perform daily activities

A physical therapist can help develop an exercise program that is appropriate for your particular condition.

If physical therapy has been recommended, ask:

**What exercises should I do at home?**

**How often should I do them?**

**What should I avoid?**

## Mediations & Chronic Pain

There are many different medications used to treat different types of pain.

Depending on the cause of your pain, treatment may involve medications that target:

- Inflammation
- Nerve pain
- Muscle pain
- Other underlying causes

Some people with chronic pain also take opioid medications. These medications can have significant risks, including dependence, overdose, constipation, sedation, and interactions with other medications.

**Never change the dose, stop a medication suddenly, or combine pain medications with alcohol or other sedating substances unless your healthcare provider has instructed you to do so.**

If you take multiple medications, ask your provider or pharmacist to review your medication list for potential interactions.

### My Pain Medications

| Medication | Dose | How Often | Reason I Take It |
|------------|------|-----------|------------------|
|            |      |           |                  |

### Medication Questions

- ☐ Do I understand why I take each medication?
- ☐ Do I know how and when to take it?
- ☐ Am I experiencing side effects?
- ☐ Could any of my medications interact with each other?
- ☐ Is there a safer or more effective treatment option?
- ☐ What should I do if I miss a dose?

## Non-Medication Strategies

Medication is not always the only component of chronic pain management.

Depending on your condition, your healthcare team may recommend:

- Physical therapy
- Exercise
- Stretching
- Heat or cold
- Relaxation techniques
- Mindfulness
- Behavioral therapy
- Improved sleep habits
- Weight management when appropriate
- Occupational therapy
- Treatment of the underlying condition

The goal is not necessarily to eliminate every sensation of pain. **A successful treatment plan may also focus on improving your ability to function, sleep, move, and participate in activities that are important to you.**

## **Stress, Anxiety & Chronic Pain**

Living with pain can be emotionally exhausting.

You may experience:

- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Depression
- Feeling helpless
- Social isolation
- 

These feelings are common among people living with chronic pain and deserve attention.

Consider talking with your healthcare provider if pain is affecting your mood or causing you to withdraw from activities or people you enjoy.

### **A Simple Relaxation Exercise**

When pain or stress feels overwhelming:

**Stop and take a slow breath in.**

**Slowly breathe out.**

Relax your shoulders.

Unclench your jaw.

Place your feet comfortably on the floor.

Take several slow breaths.

Remind yourself:

**"I don't have to solve everything right now. I can focus on the next step."**

## **When to Contact Your Healthcare Provider**

Contact your healthcare provider if:

- Your pain is significantly worsening
- Your usual treatment is no longer helping
- You develop new symptoms
- You develop new weakness or numbness
- Pain is interfering with sleep or daily activities
- You are experiencing medication side effects
- You are having difficulty taking medications as prescribed
- You have concerns about dependence or medication use

**New or rapidly worsening symptoms should not automatically be assumed to be part of your chronic pain.**

## **Seek Emergency Medical Attention When Appropriate**

Some symptoms require immediate medical evaluation rather than routine pain management.

Seek emergency care for symptoms such as:

- New sudden weakness or paralysis
- New difficulty speaking
- Sudden loss of vision
- Severe chest pain
- Severe difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness
- New loss of bowel or bladder control with significant back pain
- New severe weakness or numbness
- A serious injury
- Other symptoms your healthcare provider has identified as an emergency

## Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

- ☐ What is causing my pain?
- ☐ Is there an underlying condition that still needs to be treated?
- ☐ Is my pain primarily nerve-related, muscle-related, joint-related, inflammatory, or another type?
- ☐ Are there additional tests that I need?
- ☐ Would physical therapy help?
- ☐ What activities are safe for me?
- ☐ Are there non-medication treatments I should consider?
- ☐ Are my medications still appropriate?
- ☐ Could any of my medications be contributing to fatigue, dizziness, or other symptoms?
- ☐ Should I see a pain-management specialist?
- ☐ Would behavioral health support be helpful?
- ☐ What should I do if my pain suddenly becomes worse?

### My Questions:

|  |
|--|
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

## **My Chronic Pain Care Team**

Primary Care Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Pain Management Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Therapist: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Specialist: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacy: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **My Personal Pain Management Plan**

My primary pain condition: \_\_\_\_\_

My biggest pain-management challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

Things that help me: \_\_\_\_\_

My current treatment plan: \_\_\_\_\_

My next appointment: \_\_\_\_\_

My main goal for improving my quality of life:

## Most Important

Chronic pain can affect **your body, sleep, mood, relationships, and ability to participate in everyday life**. You do not have to simply "live with it" without discussing treatment options.

The goal of chronic pain management is often broader than simply getting the pain number to zero. Treatment may focus on **reducing pain when possible, improving sleep and mobility, treating the underlying condition, increasing function, and helping you return to activities that matter to you**.

Work with your healthcare team to develop a treatment plan that is appropriate for your specific condition. **Do not stop, increase, decrease, or combine medications on your own.**

If chronic pain is causing feelings of hopelessness, severe depression, or thoughts of hurting yourself, tell your healthcare provider immediately or seek emergency assistance.

This information is for educational purposes and does not replace individualized medical advice from your healthcare provider.