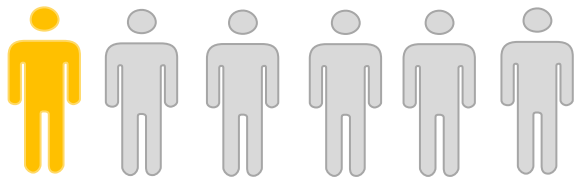


# Reducing chronic pain

## What you can do to help yourself

Chronic pain is pain you live with and experience daily. It can affect you in many ways. Some days it might not bother you at all, while other days it can be hard to ignore. It's normal to feel frustrated about having chronic pain, especially if it stops you doing the things you want to do.

The good news is many people with chronic pain get better and most can lead normal lives. Depending on the cause of the pain, and the impact that it has on your life, one or more of the following strategies might be helpful.



**1 in 6 adults**  
live with chronic pain

### Self-care strategies to help manage pain

#### Change the way you think about pain



Three months after an injury, any pain that remains is no longer a response to tissue damage. Instead it is like a song playing over and over in your brain. To help change the song, or turn the pain volume down, you can retrain your brain to respond differently to it. Instead of reacting to the pain, you can learn to respond:







- with reassuring thoughts about it not causing you harm
- with positive thoughts about what you can do to manage the pain at that moment.



#### Learn to accept the pain



This can be a difficult idea to get your head around, but it can really help.



By accepting that the pain isn't going away and shifting your focus onto what you can do about it instead, you can start to regain a sense of control over your situation.

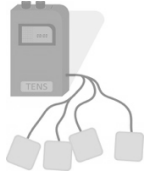


<p><b>Stay active</b></p> 	<p>For most types of pain, moving more and getting more exercise, such as walking, swimming and gentle stretching, can help improve muscle strength and reduce pain and stiffness. Try to keep moving throughout the day, rather than having long periods of inactivity followed by short bursts of doing a lot.</p> <p>Ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist to help you create a plan for regular physical activity.</p>
<p><b>Pace yourself</b></p> 	<p>Avoid doing too much in one go on good days then feeling so tired you have to rest all afternoon.</p> <p>Instead, try doing your tasks in stages with rest breaks.</p>
<p><b>Identify triggers</b></p> 	<p>Certain triggers can make your pain worse. Examples of triggers include alcohol, anxiety and stress, poor sleep habits, negative thinking and overexertion.</p> <p>Identifying your triggers will help you know what you can do to reduce your pain.</p>
<p><b>Distract yourself</b></p> 	<p>Engaging in activities you enjoy will help take your mind off your pain and can help reduce stress, tension and anxiety.</p> <p><a href="#">Mindfulness</a> is a useful meditation technique that focuses your thoughts away from your pain and directs them in a way that is helpful to managing your pain.</p>
<p><b>Learn to relax</b></p> 	<p>Relaxation reduces muscle tension and helps your mind to unwind. Find activities that help you relax and spend time each day doing them.</p> <p>Ideas include listening to music, taking a bath, meeting friends, meditating or doing yoga.</p>
<p><b>Use medications for acute pain</b></p> 	<p>Pain relief medicines don't work so well in the long term for chronic pain but can be useful when you have acute flare-ups.</p> <p>See our brochure on medicines for chronic pain or visit <a href="http://healthnavigator.org.nz/chronicpain">healthnavigator.org.nz/chronicpain</a></p>

<p><b>Have a support network</b></p> 	<p>Engage family, whanau and friends to help you manage your pain. Join a support group, church group or find a hobby that makes you feel good and helps you connect with family, whanau, friends or other people.</p> <p>Being engaged and connected can help you feel more positive and experience less pain.</p>
<p><b>Take a pain-management course</b></p> 	<p>Doing a pain-management course is a useful way to learn about managing your pain. Ask your healthcare team if there is a self-management or pain course in your area or do an online course such as the free <a href="#">Retrain Pain course</a> from the Retrain Pain Foundation.</p> <p>You can also view the New Zealand version of the <a href="#">Pain Self-Care Toolkit</a> or visit the <a href="#">Pain Toolkit</a> website and app for more resources.</p>

## Non-medications treatments for pain

There's a variety of non-medicine-based treatment options to manage pain. Before starting any treatment, see your doctor to talk about treatment options and make sure they are suitable for you.

<p><b>Physiotherapy</b></p> 	<p>Physiotherapy or exercise under the supervision and guidance of a physiotherapist can be helpful. The exercises are designed to keep you active and build on what you can already do.</p> <p>Your physiotherapist may also use other methods of treatment such as massage, TENS and acupuncture/acupressure.</p>
<p><b>Massage, manipulation and mobilisation</b></p> 	<p>Massage has been used by many cultures for centuries and can range from the holistic practice of romiromi by Maori healing practitioners to Asian styles of massage, through to more clinically focused massage by sports therapists. Massage may involve gentle as well as deep-tissue hands-on treatment to ease tension in your muscles and distract you from your pain.</p> <p>Manipulation is a more forceful movement of a joint, possibly beyond what it would normally do. It can help to increase your range of movement and reduce pain.</p>

	<p>Mobilisation is a gentle movement where your joint is moved as much as possible within your existing range of motion. Tai chi is an example of an exercise that promotes joint mobility by stretching in a slow, focused manner.</p>
<p><b>Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)</b></p> 	<p>In this technique, a hand-held device called a TENS machine is used to pass a small electric current through your skin to your nerves. It can reduce your pain by interfering with pain signals and blocking them from reaching your brain, or by stimulating production of your body's natural pain-relieving chemicals (called endorphins). It can also reduce the sensation of muscle tension and spasm.</p> <p>TENS is not suitable for everyone. People with a pacemaker should not use it.</p>
<p><b>Acupuncture</b></p> 	<p>Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine in which fine needles are inserted into parts of your body, called meridians, and sit just under the skin.</p> <p>The position and number of needles vary according to your condition and symptoms. The needles may stimulate your nerves to block pain signals and relax your muscles.</p>
<p><b>Counselling</b></p> 	<p>Counselling can help you manage your pain by changing the way you think about your pain.</p> <p>Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of counselling that focuses on teaching you techniques and skills to help you cope better with chronic pain, such as relaxation, distraction, planning a routine and problem-solving.</p>

## Need more help?

If your pain continues and is affecting what you can do, talk to your doctor. They may have suggestions of different techniques you can try or may refer you to your local pain service, a pain specialist or pain programme for extra support.

For more information about each of these tips, visit [www.healthnavigator.org.nz](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz)