

Living well with pain

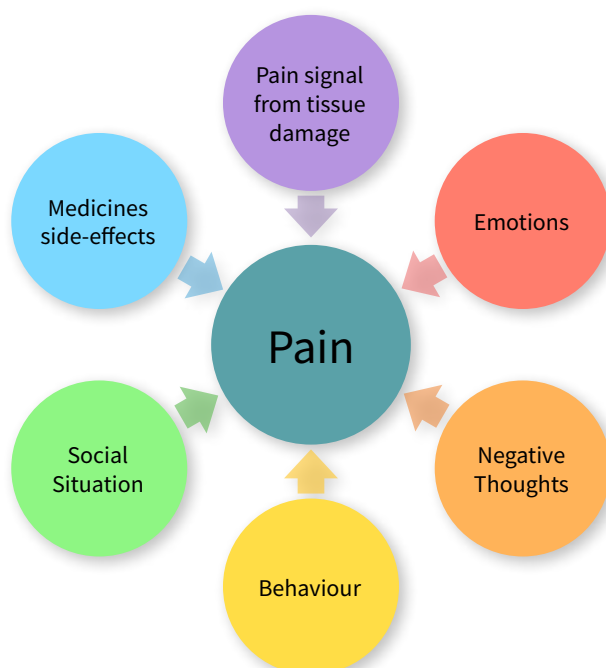
- ▶ Many people with ongoing health conditions have pain or feel uncomfortable.
- ▶ Pain that lasts longer than 3 months is called chronic pain. If you experience chronic pain, you are not alone and there are many things you can do that help.

All of us are familiar with the experience of pain. Pain can be acute (lasting for hours or days to weeks) or chronic (lasting 3 months, or more). It's important to recognise which type of pain you have, as well as understand what can be done to help.

Acute pain is usually specific to one area of the body, and disappears once the damage repairs. **Chronic or persistent pain** is the pain that is ongoing. You live with and experience this type of pain daily and it lasts for three months or more. It can range from mild to severe, be constant, or come and go. Chronic pain occurs when nerves become over-sensitive and send warning message to the brain even when there is no injury, or after the original injury causing pain has healed.

Living with chronic pain can be hard work but the good news is that there are a number of things you can do to retrain your brain and help you feel better.

Things that can make pain worse or better



Retrain your brain – make a plan and find a new normal

Negative thoughts, emotions, unhelpful behaviours and social situation, all impact on your experience of pain and your ability to live well. There are lots of things you can do to improve your pain. This toolkit will give you some ideas and tools that will help.

Tips for managing chronic pain

Ideas others have found useful:

1. Eat well and get enough sleep.
2. Change the way you think about pain.
3. Stay active and pace yourself.
4. Distract yourself and practise being mindful.
5. Reduce stress by learning to relax.
6. Try massage therapy.
7. Use medication for acute pain and flareups.
8. Develop your support network.
9. Attend a pain self-management programme.
10. Seek counselling.

About medicines

While medications are a useful option for treating short-term (acute pain), they are not very effective in treating chronic pain. When used long-term, they can have more side effects. However, there are some medications that can be used alongside physiotherapy, exercise, diet, relaxation and different ways of thinking and responding to

 Learn more at: www.hn.org.nz/painmedicines/ – Or search by **medicine name**.

More support options

Ask your doctor or nurse about a referral to:

- Your local pain service, a pain specialist or pain programme.
- Counselling — this can be especially helpful if your pain arose from a trauma e.g. a car accident OR you have other stresses or mental health issues.
- Review the pain toolkit at hn.org.nz – search for **pain toolkit**
- You could also phone: Healthline 0800 611 116

For a wide range of resources, visit www.hn.org.nz/pain

For further information you could read the book: *Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Pain*, by Sandra LeFort, Lisa Webster, Kate Lorig, et al, Bull Publishing, 2015.