



# Chronic Pain

## What is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain, or persistent pain, is pain that lasts more than three months or beyond the expected healing time of an injury or condition.

Chronic pain differs from person to person, occurring in different parts of the body, and with people describing their pain differently. Some people may experience persistent pain every day, while others may experience pain more sporadically. Chronic pain can also vary in intensity, from mild to severe, depending on the day.

There are various causes of chronic pain, including injuries, musculoskeletal problems, surgery, and cancer. Chronic pain may also arise from an underlying health condition, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and endometriosis.

It is also common for chronic pain to manifest without a known or obvious cause of pain.

## Impacts of Chronic Pain

Many people with chronic pain experience limitations in their mobility, flexibility, strength, and endurance. This can affect their ability to partake in daily tasks and activities.

Chronic pain is not limited to physical manifestation but extends to other impacts. It affects mood, sleep, and mental health.

People living with chronic pain are at a greater risk for mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders. Chronic pain also increases stress levels. Heightened cortisol levels in the body produce inflammation, which then causes pain. This can also contribute to depression and anxiety symptoms.

Chronic pain can also affect sleep. Falling asleep can become difficult due to pain discomfort and constant pain rumination, leading to sleep disturbance and sleep deprivation.

## Chronic Pain Treatment

For many individuals, chronic pain is incurable. Instead, treatment focuses on developing Pain Management Plans that help individuals experience daily life within pain interference.

Individuals may seek advice from numerous health professionals in creating their plans, such as GPs, physiotherapists, and mental health professionals. This is because treatment often includes a combination of many different treatment options, such as physiotherapy, pain medications, and self-management activities.

Lifestyle changes can influence the nervous system, modifying the process of central sensation. Physical activity is also commonly recommended as part of Pain Management Plans.

Good nutrition is also often recommended, as well as diets that reduce weight and inflammation, two factors that can affect chronic pain.

Social connection and support can also support pain management, such as scheduling time with family or friends, or joining a chronic pain support group.

Many psychological interventions are also common in managing chronic pain. These can include mindfulness, Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and relaxation techniques.

### Mindfulness-Based Approach

Mindfulness enables us to look at pain with curiosity and non-judgement. This could involve practising breathing exercises and engaging in a visualised body scan – a practice in guided imagery that teaches the brain to be present with each part of the body. This can be measured by biofeedback when looking at its effectiveness.

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT teaches people how to change and challenge their negative thought patterns, particularly those associated with depression and anxiety. CBT supports those with chronic pain by looking at how they think and behave in response to pain and teaching the brain to modify its pain message.

### Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), mindfulness, and meditation assist in relaxing both mind and body. These, in turn, can alleviate pain, and its comorbid symptoms.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation, for example, helps with reducing muscle tension. Other relaxation techniques can calm the mind, helping alleviate the mentally debilitating effects of chronic pain that exacerbate symptoms.

### Final Words

Chronic pain is a complex and individualised condition that affects a person's daily tasks and activities, as well as their mental health. If you need support in dealing with chronic pain, Acacia EAP is available 24/7.



# 3.6 Million

Australians are affected by Chronic Pain. It is the leading cause of disability in Australia.

Chronic Pain Australia, (2024), [Resource](#).