



Chronic Pain Fact Sheet

What Is Chronic Pain?

Pain is the most common reason for physician visits in regions with advanced healthcare systems such as Europe and the United States¹. It is a major symptom in many medical conditions and has many causes and treatments. Severe pain can significantly interfere with a person's quality of life and functionality.

When pain lasts for a long time, often six months or longer, it is considered to be chronic pain. An alternative definition is pain that lasts one month longer than generally expected for a particular injury, surgery, or disease.

There are many causes of chronic pain. Accidents, injuries, degenerative diseases, prior surgeries, or even the regular aging process can contribute to nerve damage or bodily changes that may cause chronic pain.

The Impact of Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a serious and costly public health issue around the world. It is also an ailment that is largely under-treated and misunderstood. Pain is a condition that affects one's physical, mental, and societal well-being; it also burdens one's family, friends, and community.

100 million people in the U.S. suffer from common chronic pain conditions, and chronic pain is the primary cause of adult disability in the United States². The majority of these pain conditions are felt in the back or legs. Chronic pain is also a huge economic burden that is associated with an annual cost of \$600 billion² in the U.S. Roughly half of this figure is attributed to healthcare costs, and the other half is attributed to lost productivity.

Treating Chronic Pain

There are a variety of treatment options for chronic pain that range from medications to surgical interventions. Conservative options include over-the-counter medications and physical therapy; these options are typically prescribed early in the pain treatment pathway. More powerful prescription drugs can also be prescribed, but there is caution about prescribing potent analgesics ("pain killers" such as opiates) because of addiction potential, long term dependence and little evidence of improved function. Invasive measures such as spinal surgery are an option that could involve a long recovery period. Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) represents another option to treat chronic pain. It involves the delivery of electrical signals to the spinal cord in order to alter pain signals to the brain. SCS is a reversible therapy that has helped hundreds of thousands of people experience relief from chronic pain.

1. Debono DJ, et al. Caring for patients with chronic pain: pearls and pitfalls. J Am Osteopath Assoc. 2013 Aug; 113(8):620-7.
2. Relieving Pain in America: A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education, and Research. Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2011.