

CHRONIC PAIN

A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by: Innovative Psychological Consultants

Description

It is important to distinguish between acute and chronic pain. Acute pain is a normal sensation triggered in the nervous system to alert you of possible injury and the need to take care of yourself. It is often a short lived and fleeting type of pain. Chronic pain persists and pain receptors continue firing in the nervous system for days, weeks, or even years. Chronic pain can be worsened by environmental and psychological factors. Causes can be from degeneration of discs, cancer, burns, headaches, sciatica, neuropathy, and countless other sources. Some stem from injury, diseases, or various syndromes or conditions. You might be experiencing chronic pain if any of the following are true for you: your pain has lasted more than 6 months, you have pain from an injury that should have healed by now, your pain gets worse when stressed or angry, your pain medications have stopped working even if your dose has been increased, you have trouble sleeping from your pain, your pain is affecting your social life, you regularly call in sick due to the pain, or it's hard for you to enjoy activities due to pain.

Symptoms & Features

There is no one set of criteria or symptoms that fit chronic pain. In addition to the enduring pain symptoms such as burning, aching, soreness, tightness or stiffness a person experiences, they typically experience one or more of the following symptoms: 1) depression or anxiety, 2) disturbed sleep (insomnia), 3) blurry vision, 4) nausea, 5) headaches, 6) confusion or lack of concentration, 7) flu like aches and pains, 8) decreased coordination, 9) Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

There is an estimated 50 million Americans suffering each year from chronic pain issues. 1 in 3 people lose more than 5 hours of sleep weekly due to pain issues. Pain issues are the second leading cause of work absenteeism. There are more than 100 different types of arthritis that some 33 million people suffer with. Chronic pain issues costs an estimated 100 million dollars annually. Women are less likely to receive treatment than men. Dependence to pain medications is one of the fastest growing types of addictions, many of them receiving medication for pain management.

Treatment

The type of treatment will depend on the source of the pain. Treatments include medications, surgeries, brain stimulation, local electrical stimulation, and acupuncture to name a few. The goal of pain management is to improve functioning and allow people to work, engage in social activities and have meaningful relationships. Often it is a combination of treatments that works best for most people.

Sometimes the end result is that pain cannot be eliminated. When this happens the goal shifts to pain reduction, minimization, and management. Psychotherapy is increasingly being utilized to facilitate these goals. Therapy approaches include cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, biofeedback, guided imagery, or hypnosis. One of the most difficult hurdles that counselors help people deal with is the acceptance that they may have to continue coping with pain. They also help clients learn to listen to their bodies and work on pacing techniques.

What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you struggle with chronic pain, you should work with your physician to assist in making a diagnosis and figure out the best course of treatment. In addition, you can read about chronic pain and its treatment. You can join a support group, learn stress management skills, meditation, find activities that help you relax, utilize social supports, get moderate exercise and eat healthy. Some of our clinicians at I.P.C. assist with chronic pain.