

# Daily habits to reduce chronic pain

By Sherellen Gerhart

More than 100 million Americans are living with chronic pain. That's more than the number of Americans affected by cancer, heart disease, and diabetes combined. A person with chronic pain is three to four times more likely to dealing with depression as well.



Sherellen  
Gerhart

Chronic pain can last for weeks, months – even years. Sometimes chronic pain is caused by an injury, infection, or an ongoing condition like arthritis or cancer. Not managing chronic pain can lead to deepening depression, poor sleep, agitation, and loss of concentration.

Keep in mind, if you are living with chronic pain, you can find relief. There are many solutions available that can help you live a happier, healthier life – despite your pain. For starters, try these strategies:

- Get out of bed. Although it may be tempting to go on bed rest while you're in pain, staying active daily will help keep your body – and mind – in better shape. Avoid movements that makes pain worse, but try low-impact activities that minimize the risk for further injury.

Your doctor can suggest the safest activities for you.

- Relax. Certain relaxation techniques, such as meditation or breathing exercises, have proven to be helpful in managing chronic pain. Plus, going to your own “happy place” can distract you from any physical pain. The American Chronic Pain Association ([theacpa.org](http://theacpa.org)) offers a relaxation guide, or try downloading a guided imagery app to your smartphone.
- Take the right medication for your pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, and acetaminophen, can be purchased over-the-counter and relieve muscular and bone pain. But some people, especially older adults with certain diagnosis, cannot take NSAIDs because of specific risks. Be sure to get guidance from your health care provider as to appropriate dosing and use.
- Antidepressants may help control pain as well as any emotional toll you may be experiencing. Muscle relaxants, another prescribed option, are often used to reduce pain caused by muscle spasms. Talk with your doctor about what the best fit for you.
- Try yoga. Yoga can be key in preventing or even reversing the mental effects of chronic pain. Depression or anxiety caused by chronic pain can lead to loss in brain tissue, which can then lead to memory impairment and emotional problems. Research shows that regular yoga practice has the opposite effect on the brain – a major reason to roll out your mat.
- Feed your body good food. Certain foods can fight inflammation, make your bones stronger, and therefore help alleviate your pain. The best foods for arthritic pain, for example, include fish, soy, and olive oil because they contain anti-inflammatory properties like omega-3 fatty acids. Plus, a healthy diet can help lift your spirits.

In addition to these strategies, be sure to talk with your

doctor about self-care solutions that are tailored to your own chronic pain.

*Sherellen Gerhart is a physician board certified in internal medicine, palliative and hospice medicine, and geriatric medicine. She oversees Barton Palliative Care and provides support, consultation, and education for patients and their families.*