

What to do about Stress

Stress Management can have a positive effect on controlling your Chronic Pain. It is important to learn new and effective approaches to manage stress.

Ways of reducing stress for people experiencing Chronic Pain:

- Eat healthy
- Reduce caffeine
- Exercise/get active within your physical capability
- Learn new ways to relax
- Be organized
- Set realistic goals
- Simplify
- Plan and pace activities
- Say 'no'
- Keep some focus on the good things in life
- Talk to people you trust/ask for help
- Make time for fun in your life
- Give yourself credit (and little rewards)
- Laugh more

Get Stress Under Control

- Recognize how stress affects you, your Chronic Pain, and your life
- Build your personal stress management resources
- Choose healthy ways to manage stress
- Remember, stress can not be eliminated, but it can be controlled

It's ok to take care of Yourself...no one else can.

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Chronic Pain and Stress

What stress is...

Stress is defined as emotional, physical, and mental strain.

- It is the adaptation of the mind and body to challenge or change.
- It can be 'wear and tear' or a 'recharge'.
- The pressure can make you feel tense inside.
- In medical terms, stress is the disruption of homeostasis; you feel "off- balance".

Stress occurs when:

- There are major life changes (good or bad).
- Ongoing daily hassles pile up.
- Demands on you are greater than your resources.
- You feel threatened or out of control.

Know that:

- Stress is normal, and it can be either good or bad. Small amounts of stress can keep you alert and motivated.
- Too much stress impacts your physical and emotional well-being, and your ability to cope.
- Stress can depend on the individual interpretation of a situation; one person may look forward to talking in front of a group, while another person may dread it.

How do you know you are under stress?

Unrelieved stress can affect your life, with many negative possibilities. Being able to recognize common stress symptoms can give you a jump start on better managing your life with chronic pain.

Common signs of stress:

Physical:

- Increase in blood pressure
- Trouble sleeping
- Headache
- Sweating
- Increased muscle tension and pain

Behavioral:

- Drinking too much coffee
- Grinding your teeth
- Nail-biting
- Eating too much junk food
- Being short- tempered

Cognitive (Thinking):

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Negative self-talk
- Expecting the worst
- Avoiding decisions

Emotional:

- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Sadness
- Feeling overwhelmed

Connection between Stress and Chronic Pain

Stress Management changes when people experience Chronic Pain. Typical stress management strategies are often physical (walking, exercising, and engaging in a distracting activity). For people with Chronic Pain, these can increase pain levels and add more stress.

Lifestyle changes that often come with Chronic Pain may also add stress: role-changes, not working, increased down-time, decreased socialization and leisure, financial strain, ongoing health-care appointments, and dealing with legal or insurance issues, can all increase your stress load.

Chronic Pain can also make it harder to deal with the typical 'normal' stressors. It can leave you with less energy to deal with life stressors.

Stress can make your Chronic Pain worse. The increased muscle tension that occurs when your stress is high will increase your pain.

Chronic Pain can be a 24 hour a day stressor; however, there are ways for people experiencing Chronic Pain to control stress.

Remember, stress can be controlled.