

With chronic pain the take home message is clear: Collaborate for best results

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Although experiencing some pain is an unpleasant fact of life, *chronic pain* can be devastating. Acute pain is time limited and usually stops when the cause of the pain is no longer present. By contrast, chronic pain is longer term and complex in nature; a guideline is that chronic pain lasts longer than six months and does not respond to treatment.

For your MVA clients, it is important to have chronic pain addressed in a comprehensive way because living with chronic pain can potentially trigger a negative cycle that results in both physical and emotional deterioration. “Chronic pain can affect not only physical health, but also emotional well-being. It can intrude into all aspects of an individual’s life, ranging from home and work to leisure and social relationships.”¹

For instance, a client who is still experiencing pain long after their motor vehicle accident may stop numerous activities due to the pain they experience — or think they will experience — if they try to do these activities. Inactivity often leads to more inactivity until finally the client becomes totally sedentary. This situation usually triggers feelings of helplessness, dependency, and guilt, as well as strong emotions like anger and frustration.

Depression and intense feelings of worthlessness often set in over time as chronic pain sufferers become stuck in a “cycle of pain” — the pain leads to inactivity — the inactivity leads to increased physical and emotional deterioration that leads to more inactivity — and so it goes, sometimes lasting numerous years. The best place to start in preventing this cycle — or breaking it — is to receive an expert assessment of the many factors that may be influencing the pain problem.

Collaboration of a wide range of healthcare professionals is essential because it addresses both the physical aspects of chronic pain as well as the psychological issues. Physiotherapists, occupational therapists, chiropractors, physicians, psychologists, nurses, social workers, and pharmacists can all have a role to play in facilitating a satisfying lifestyle for chronic pain clients. Where appropriate, vocational assessments also help with reintegration into the workforce.

Ideally, collaboration helps the client completely conquer the chronic pain issues, however, sometimes complete recovery is not possible. In these cases, the collaborative approach helps the client develop both physical and emotional skills necessary to cope in a positive way. Whether full recovery or maximum recovery, collaboration makes all the difference. Please see the attachment for an overview of chronic pain treatments.

(*Chronic Pain*, Wayne J. Millar, Health Reports, Spring 1996, Volume 7, No. 5, Statistics Canada)

OVERVIEW OF CHRONIC PAIN TREATMENTS

<p>Medications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Painkillers (analgesic medications):</i> such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), acetaminophen, morphine and codeine can often provide some relief • <i>Anesthetics:</i> given as ointments, patches or medications can provide some relief if taken slowly and steadily in small amounts • <i>Corticosteroids:</i> reduce bone cancer pain • <i>Anticonvulsant medications:</i> relieve pain associated with damaged nerves • <i>Antidepressants:</i> relieve nerve-related pain in some cases
<p>Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The therapist uses a special machine to direct electrical energy to the painful sites of the body. The energy starts a reaction in the nervous system to temporarily relieve the pain.
<p>Acupuncture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The acupuncturist inserts thin needles just under the surface of the skin at specific body points, stimulating natural anti-pain chemicals in the nervous system.
<p>Relaxation and meditation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A trained instructor teaches techniques that safely help relax muscles without the risk of re-injury. • These techniques not only help with relaxation, strength, and endurance, they often also help develop a positive attitude and relieve anxiety.
<p>Biofeedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The therapist uses an instrument to measure breathing, heart rate, and specific body responses and feeds them back in the form of light or sound to help the individual learn how to control their bodily responses.
<p>Psychological treatments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The psychologist applies a range of psychological approaches in combination with the other treatment techniques so the client receives a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Cognitive approaches foster thoughts, emotions and actions that are adaptive for managing a life with pain. ○ Behavioural approaches help people plan their activities in ways that give them more control without increasing the pain. ○ Psychological therapy for anxiety and depression is helpful in managing the emotional consequences of chronic pain. When indicated, therapy for drug or alcohol abuse helps people deal with addiction. For people who find that chronic pain has affected their personal relationships, marital or family therapy is often recommended.” (Canadian Psychology Association website, Chronic Pain, www.cpa.ca)