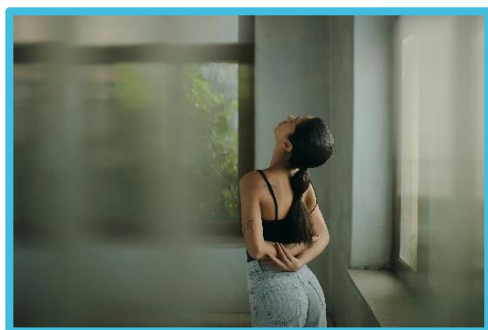


Tip sheet

Chronic pain

Chronic pain affects around 20% of Kiwis aged 15 and older, though the exact prevalence can vary between ages and ethnic groups. Long-lasting pain can be life-changing, impacting mental health, ability to work and even relationships.

If you're experiencing chronic pain, please consult your doctor first; the advice of your healthcare professional should always guide your responses and treatment plan. However, there are also simple ways to approach and help ease and manage chronic pain.



What is chronic pain?

We call pain chronic when it resists treatment and continues for over 12 weeks. There are several types of pain (e.g. muscular, nerve, joint...), and many different conditions that can cause it.

Some common sources of chronic pain include:

- Arthritis
- Injuries
- Complex regional pain syndrome
- Endometriosis
- Cancer
- Nerve damage
- Obesity
- Poor posture
- Psychological stress
- Fibromyalgia
- Age-related pain.

If you're experiencing new pain, don't forget to consult your doctor. But even if you already know where the pain is coming from, the underlying cause might not be clear right away – or ever. This can be

extremely frustrating, but if you've tried all avenues of exploration and the process is causing you stress and worry, it may help to focus on adapting how you do various activities to enjoy the most out of life.

Impacts on mental health

Chronic pain can take a toll on the mind as well as the body; after all, the two are connected. In the same way that too much stress can make us physically ill, the pressures and struggles of chronic pain can drain us emotionally.

It's easy for the stressors of chronic pain to pile up. This can leave people feeling helpless and even contribute to physical pain when left unattended.

Changing your mindset

Remember, you're not alone and your journey isn't over yet. Managing chronic pain may be long term, but can control how you respond to it.

Notice and cut off negativity

Be aware of when the negative thoughts creep in and stop them in their tracks. Redirect your thinking to what you can control and what makes you happy.

Talk to a friend or write it down

Share what you're going through with somebody close (or write it into a journal). This can help you get the negative thoughts out of your head and give you reassurance and support in turn.

Working with chronic pain

Aside from the internal impacts, chronic pain can affect the workplace – including attendance (from feeling unwell or going to appointments), productivity (inability to focus or move as before) and how you engage with others.

Being open with your manager (if you feel comfortable) can help create a more supportive environment. Ask about adjustments like flexible hours, ergonomic equipment or the option to work from home. Many workplaces are becoming more aware of chronic health conditions and are open to solutions.

Know your rights

New Zealand employment law protects people with health conditions. If pain is affecting your ability to work, you may be eligible for support through ACC or Work and Income.

Adaptive techniques

Use actions or techniques that require fewer physical demands and consider the use of adaptive tools. Take regular breaks and don't exert to the point of unbearable pain.

Break big tasks into smaller chunks

This reduces pressure and helps maintain your productivity without overexerting yourself.

Incorporate gentle movement

Simple stretching, short walks or mobility exercises during breaks can ease stiffness and improve circulation.

Stay hydrated and eat well

Good nutrition and hydration can influence inflammation and overall energy levels.

Self-care to manage chronic pain

Because chronic pain can come from a diverse number of conditions and manifest differently, the way you respond should be unique to your needs and situation. With that in mind, here are some suggestions for staying well. Please use these only alongside the advice of – or as guided by – your healthcare professional.

Practise mindfulness or meditation

These techniques can help reduce the emotional response to pain.

Consider therapy

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) has been shown to help manage chronic pain by changing unhelpful thinking patterns.

Stay socially connected

Isolation can worsen both pain and mood, so make time for friends, family, or support groups.

Prioritise sleep

Rest is crucial. Creating a calming night-time routine and avoiding screens before bed can help improve sleep quality.



Living with chronic pain can be incredibly challenging – but with the right tools, support and mindset, it's possible to find balance and live well. Don't be afraid to advocate for your needs. You're not alone, and help is always available.

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