

Non-Drug Ways to Manage Your Chronic Pain

When adults are living with chronic pain, it is recommended that they first try non-drug pain management methods and/or non-opioid pain medications. Many people use more than one method to manage pain. When used alone, opioids can be ineffective and come with serious side effects and risks.

Physical

Psychological

Preventive



Psychological methods help you understand the connection between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. What you think affects how you feel. You may be able to change your pain or how you feel about it by changing your thoughts and how you respond to pain. Mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy (also called CBT), and yoga use psychological methods that may help to safely manage chronic pain.

“Thoughts and feelings can overtake us and escalate our pain. Learning to practice daily mindfulness, gentle yoga and learning the power of positive thinking helps me manage stress and keep my pain controlled.”

– Virginia McIntyre



Mindfulness

Mindfulness can help you change how you think and feel about your pain. It may also help with managing other medical conditions (i.e., trouble sleeping). Mindfulness guides you to pay attention to what you are feeling and then how to perceive the pain. Practising mindfulness can mean different things to different people. It may involve the use of meditation and breathing techniques. A health care provider can help you get started with mindfulness or you can find self-help information online.

Research shows mindfulness may lower pain for people with:

- low back pain
- fibromyalgia.



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

CBT teaches you to better cope with your pain by thinking and living in healthy ways. It involves learning skills for changing unhelpful thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes towards pain. You can receive CBT in person through counselling with a therapist, or online (with or without the help of an online therapist).

Research shows CBT may lower pain for people with:

- low back pain
- neck pain
- knee osteoarthritis pain
- fibromyalgia.



Yoga

Yoga is a mind-body practice that attempts to put you more in tune with yourself. It can also be used as a form of exercise. Yoga uses movements, positions, and breath control. For some, yoga can include a self-awareness, meditative, and spiritual component. Yoga can be adapted for all skill levels and abilities.

Research shows yoga may lower pain for people with:

- low back pain
- primary dysmenorrhea (painful menstruation).



You may not see your type of pain listed. It doesn't mean these methods to manage pain won't work for you. It may simply mean research has not been done or reviewed on this type of pain yet. In addition, if you do have one of the pain conditions listed, mindfulness, CBT, and/or yoga may not help you achieve the lowering of pain that you hope. Everybody responds differently to pain management methods, and you need to find the methods that work best for you. Ask your health care provider about options you can use to manage your pain. For more ways to do so without medication, see the handouts on physical and preventive methods.

To access a PDF of this handout visit: www.cadth.ca/chronicpain

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