

# 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 find out more about methods for managing chronic pain and their availability in Saskatchewan visit: [www.saskpain.ca](http://www.saskpain.ca)

To access a PDF of this handout visit: [www.cadth.ca/chronicpain](http://www.cadth.ca/chronicpain)



CADTH would like to thank the Saskatchewan Health Authority's Department of Pain Strategy for its clinical expertise in reviewing and informing development of the Non-Drug Ways to Manage Your Chronic Pain handouts.

**Acknowledgments:** CADTH would like to thank SaskPain for its assistance with identifying individuals living with chronic pain who reviewed the handouts. A special thanks to the individuals (full names at [www.cadth.ca/chronicpain](http://www.cadth.ca/chronicpain)) who reviewed and contributed to the handouts.

## Questions or comments about CADTH or this tool?

Online:  
[cadth.ca](http://cadth.ca)

Twitter:  
[@CADTH\\_ACMTS](https://twitter.com/CADTH_ACMTS)

Email:  
[requests@cadth.ca](mailto:requests@cadth.ca)

New at CADTH Newsletter:  
[cadth.ca/subscribe](http://cadth.ca/subscribe)

### DISCLAIMER

This material is made available for informational purposes only and no representations or warranties are made with respect to its fitness for any particular purpose; this document should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice or for the application of professional judgment in any decision-making process. Users may use this document at their own risk. The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the contents of this document. CADTH is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or injury, loss, or damage arising from or relating to the use of this document and is not responsible for any third-party materials contained or referred to herein. Subject to the aforementioned limitations, the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Health Canada, Canada's provincial or territorial governments, other CADTH funders, or any third-party supplier of information. This document is subject to copyright and other intellectual property rights and may only be used for non-commercial, personal use or private research and study.

### ABOUT CADTH

CADTH is an independent, not-for-profit organization responsible for providing Canada's health care decision-makers with objective evidence to help make informed decisions about the optimal use of drugs and medical devices in our health care system.

CADTH receives funding from Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments, with the exception of Quebec.

February 2021