

## CHRONIC PAIN & MENTAL HEALTH

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### Do I have CHRONIC PAIN?

You may be experiencing chronic pain if you answer yes to the following questions:

1. I have aches or pains in my body.
2. The pain I experience is there more often than not.
3. The pain I feel distracts or distresses me.
4. I have experienced this pain for at least 6 months.

### How might my pain impact my MENTAL HEALTH?

- Feeling sad or blue.
- Feeling out of control of one's life.
- Low self-esteem, depression, anger, and hopelessness.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO if I have chronic pain?

1. If you are not already under the care of a doctor or team of doctors, you should seek medical attention first. **Telling your doctor about your pain** will help him or her find the right treatment(s) for you. Tell your doctor:
    - Where the pain is
    - How bad it is
    - How often your pain occurs
    - What makes your pain better or worse
  2. **Educate yourself** about how different experiences/factors impact the pain you experience. By learning about your condition, you empower yourself in treating the pain. Recognize the **psychosocial aspects** of your pain. Pain and depression are linked: mood affects pain and pain affects mood. Chronic pain has the ability to control your life. Only you can prevent this by being aware of how pain can overtake your life and take steps to prevent this.
  3. **Seek psychological counseling if appropriate.** Understand that your pain is related to your mood and your level of distress, and vice versa. Taking care of the emotional aspects of chronic pain is necessary to treat your overall pain condition.
  4. **Lifestyle changes** are also an important part of treatment for chronic pain.
    - Get regular sleep at night.
    - Stop smoking because nicotine can make some medications less effective.
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1. **Learn to RELAX.** Deep breathing exercises, meditation, and muscle relaxation exercises have been shown to help reduce one's perception of pain. Ask your counselor for these skills to help manage your pain.

