What is chronic pain?
Chronic, persistent or long-term pain is pain continuing beyond 3 months or after healing is complete.\(^{(1)}\) Affecting adults and children, it may arise from tissue damage or inflammation or have no identified cause. It can affect a specific body area (e.g. Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, low back pain (LBP), pelvic pain) or be widespread (e.g. fibromyalgia). Chronic pain is a complex condition with physical, social and psychological components, which can lead to disability, loss of independence and poor quality of life (QoL).\(^{(2)}\)

Physiotherapy
Physiotherapy in hospitals, clinics and the community aims to achieve healthy levels of activity and self-management for people with chronic pain.\(^{(3)}\) Clinical and cost-effectiveness evidence supports using a cognitive behavioural approach addressing both physical limitations and people’s beliefs about, and understanding of, their condition.\(^{(4)}\) People with multiple health issues or whose pain is causing significant physical, psychological or social problems may require management by a multidisciplinary pain service.

Physiotherapists can help identify reasons for lack of progress in rehabilitation, such as fear avoidance of movement or unhelpful patterns of over- and under-activity.

GP referral to services for advice and exercise improves outcomes and is cost effective.\(^{(5)}\) Using a risk-stratification tool and providing risk-matched treatment improves the condition, shortens time off work, reduces sickness certification and health-care costs.\(^{(6)}\)

Physiotherapy maximizes activity, improves quality of life and promotes self-management for people with chronic pain.

One in five Canadians live with chronic pain.\(^{(13)}\)
Manual therapy or acupuncture may produce short term benefit,(7) but evidence supports the use of active treatments such as therapeutic exercise.(5) Multidisciplinary pain management programs (PMP)(8) including physiotherapy(9) are an effective intervention for people with chronic pain(10) and cost saving compared to physiotherapy alone.(10) Physiotherapy supports and enables people with chronic pain to remain in or return to work.(3) Mindfulness(11) and acceptance & commitment therapy (ACT) have been shown to be as effective as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and are used in some centres.(12) Physiotherapists signpost people to online and community resources to support ongoing self-management.(13)

**Conclusion**

Chronic pain can impact significantly upon physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Physiotherapy utilizing a broad scope of practice can safely and cost-effectively support and guide people with long term pain towards the best possible quality of life.

---

**References**

22. Barton PM et al, A flexible format interdisciplinary treatment and rehabilitation program at CPC was effective in the treatment of chronic daily headache.(62)