



What is a plan for pain management?

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued, we have learned that some patients continue to experience pain that persists weeks or even months after recovering from their acute illness. Persistent pain has been reported in both joints and muscles. We are still learning more about the causes of this persistent pain. We do know that these symptoms overlap with other chronic pain syndromes. Treatments for these different conditions also overlap and would likely be beneficial for patients experiencing persistent pain after COVID-19 infection.

Self-care for chronic pain uses multiple strategies, many of which a patient can do independent of their provider. For your chronic pain, consider:

What lifestyle changes can help relieve pain?

- Make sure you get **enough sleep**. For most adults, that will be 7-9 hours. For additional information, check out this site:
<https://medlineplus.gov/healthysleep.html>
- Do regular **physical activity**. Long-term, this can reduce pain levels. If you have not already been active, start slowly and gradually increase how much activity you get. You may want to see a physical therapist, who can help you create a plan that is right for you. To learn more visit:
<https://careguides.med.umich.edu/physical-activity>
- Eat a **healthy diet**. It is important to stay well-nourished even if you are in pain. Having a good diet will help improve the way your medications work, reduce side effects, and maintain the energy you need to carry out your daily activity. Learn more at: <https://careguides.med.umich.edu/adult-nutrition>

- Manage your **stress** levels - there are many ways to address stress, including getting regular exercise, setting aside time for enjoyable activities, and connecting with others that can provide support. You can also try an app or online program for Emotional and Mental Well-being. (access <https://uhs.umich.edu/apps-stress> to find a list). If your stress is severe or unmanageable, talk with your provider and/or therapist and check out these resources:
 - University of Michigan Depression Center Toolkit at <https://www.depressioncenter.org/depression-toolkit>
 - University Health Service resources for students and the U-M community: <https://uhs.umich.edu/stressresources>.
- Create a “go-to” list of fun or distracting activities that can take your mind off of your pain. This can include things like watching a funny movie, reading an interesting book, or hanging out with friends.
- Learn to pace yourself. If you do too much, it can make your symptoms worse. Learn to balance being active with your need for rest. Breaking tasks up into smaller tasks can allow you to continue to be productive without unduly worsening your symptoms.

What kind of therapies can help with pain relief?

Talk therapy, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can help you learn strategies to deal with pain, stress, and negative thoughts. If you also have depression along with your pain, talk therapy can help with that too.

Complementary therapies have helped some people with chronic pain. But researchers need to do more studies to show which ones are effective. You could consider trying them but check with your health care provider first. These therapies include

- Massage therapy

- Movement therapies
- Chiropractic therapy
- Acupuncture

Medicines

- Over-the-counter pain relievers
- Prescription medicines
- Certain antidepressants may help with pain or sleep problems

What can I do if self-care is not helping?

If self-care isn't helping, or if your pain is not controlled, talking with your provider is the next step. They can do additional assessments, prescribe medications as needed, and refer to specialists depending on your symptoms.

Where can I learn more?

- Pain: Hope Through Research. Access at:
<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Hope-Through-Research/Pain-Hope-Through-Research>
- Chronic Pain page on the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) website: <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Chronic-Pain-Information-Page>
- <https://medlineplus.gov/>. Search for pain or chronic pain.

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