How and Why to Track Pain

by ANGELA FINLAY

Steps to Gaining Control Over Pain

Living with chronic pain can be constantly upsetting or surprisingly tolerable, depending on your approach. It can be difficult to know which approach works best for you, especially when your mind is focused on the discomfort, but learning to track your pain is a good first step. Ultimately, good pain-tracking habits will improve the way you perceive, predict and respond to flare-ups, and you'll begin to experience a more joyful and comfortable daily life in a matter of weeks. Let's look at tracking chronic pain.

Why Tracking Pain Matters

Understanding when and why your pain strikes can drastically reduce the time and effort it takes to get relief. Everyone who suffers from chronic pain will experience it differently: sometimes a certain food, activity or emotion can trigger a flare-up. There may be some simple, readily available tools to reduce the intensity, but to find them, you need to devote some attention to the patterns and consequences of your pain. By thinking about your pain now, you free up lots of time for more important, more enjoyable activities in the days ahead.

How to Track Your Pain Effectively

Whether you choose to keep a journal, read a book or consult with a therapist, tracking pain effectively will involve a few different tasks:

- **Studying your pain.** Pain tends to come in waves, so even if you have some degree of pain all the time, there are likely periods when you feel it less or more. Keep track of when your pain is at its worst, including what other factors may be at play.
- **Assessing your approach to pain management.** Pain tracking is an ongoing experiment, a way to stand back and look at your pain with a logical and proactive mind. You will need to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses in your pain management program and be willing to change your perspective to improve your situation.
- **Testing new approaches.** Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, works for a large percentage of pain sufferers. This teaches you to adjust your emotional reactions to pain and can decrease the intensity and frequency of flare-ups. There are plenty of other techniques available, so keep an open mind and talk to your doctor or a counselor about methods that may work well for your personality and lifestyle.

Best Tools to Help You Track Pain

The actual method you use to track your pain can be simple, high-tech or varied – a lot will depend on your organizational style and personal preferences. Some appealing pain-tracking approaches include:

- Keeping a journal.
- Using a smartphone app designed for pain tracking.

- Attending group therapy.
- Joining an online program designed for chronic pain sufferers.

Trial and error are at the heart of pain tracking, so don’t be surprised if you hit a few rough patches as you tailor your approach. The goal is to spot patterns so you can better predict when and how pain will hit and then learn what sort of response best suits each situation. It can take some time, but you will eventually learn how to limit the effects of your chronic pain and improve your quality of life.