8 Strategies for Dealing With Chronic Pain

by ERIN SCOTT

How to Deal With Chronic Pain

Living with chronic pain can be quite a challenge. The pain itself is a physical discomfort, a barrier to everyday tasks and drains your energy.

There is also an emotional cost to chronic pain. Always being in pain can cause depression, anxiety and other negative emotions.

Hope is not lost though! You do not have to give up, simply because you have chronic pain. There are a number of ways that you can learn to cope with the pain – both the physical and emotional challenges that you are facing.

How to Deal With Chronic Pain: Physical Coping Strategies

Coping with the physical aspect of chronic pain can be difficult, but there are a few ways to find some relief.

1. Hot and Cold Therapy

One of the key ways to cope with chronic pain is to use heat, or cold, on the affected area. But when should you use heat, and when should you use cold?

Heat therapy is often used to deal with muscle pain, as it can relax muscles and help healing by increasing blood flow. You can use dry heat therapy, where the heat source does not include a damp or wet element (for example, heating pads and dry heat packs), or wet heat therapy, where the source is moist (for example, moist heat packs and baths).

If the painful area is bruised, burned, or you are prone to burns, you should not use heat therapy. Talk to your doctor about using heat, as some health conditions may elevate your risks.

Cold therapy works by reducing blood flow to the targeted area. This reduces inflammation and pain.

Ice packs, coolant sprays, ice baths, ice massages, cryo stretching and whole-body cold therapy chambers can all be used, depending if you need to focus on a particular area or your whole body.

If you have poor circulation, nerve or sensory issues, or stiff muscles and joints, cold therapy is not generally recommended, and you should speak to your doctor.

2. Light Exercise

I know that when you hurt, the last thing you want to do is to move around and work out, but light exercise can help!

Certain forms of stretching and light workouts can reduce pain by keeping your muscles and soft tissues strong and limber and by giving you a physical and mental lift through endorphins. Going for a walk, or doing group classes, can have additional benefits because you can enjoy nature and socialize.

3. Good Sleep Hygiene

A good night's rest does wonders for the body and soul. Poor sleep, however, has been shown to disrupt healing and increase chronic pain.

So, how can you sleep better? Here are some tips:

- Limit daytime naps.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and food that can be upsetting near bedtime.
- Have a clear bedtime routine.
- Create a pleasant bedroom environment (a comfortable temperature, phone turned off, bright lights turned off or adjusted, blackout curtains if needed and even fans or white noise machines).

3. Pacing

One of the challenges with chronic pain is that it can be exhausting. Pushing through this exhaustion and pain to carry out everyday tasks can be a huge uphill battle. Unfortunately, this can cause a cycle of more pain and fatigue.

But, by pacing your activity and trying to balance your life better, you can end this cycle.

One handy way to plan and pace is to set up a calendar with all your activities on it. You can even color code it to easily identify what type of activity is what. For example, red is a medical appointment, blue is a social activity, etc. This way, you can see how busy you are on what days, and you can better space things out.

How to Deal With Chronic Pain: Emotional Coping Strategies

Living with chronic pain can make you feel alone, ashamed or embarrassed and overwhelmed. While dealing with the physical aspect of chronic pain is important, people who suffer from ongoing pain should also address their mental health too.

1. Support Groups

Having chronic pain can cause a lot of isolation. Not only is it often hard to get out and see your friends and family, but sometimes it is hard to connect to others when they do not understand what you are experiencing.

This is why support groups are so important. Nowadays, whether you want to attend an in-person group, or would rather join one online, there are all sorts of options for you.

They provide an outlet to vent, get advice and even make friends.

2. Mindfulness Exercises

Studies have shown that mindfulness meditation has many benefits, especially for your mental and emotional health. There is even evidence that it can help rewire your brain to help relieve symptoms of depression and to produce more positive feelings.

It is a practice that makes you stop and focus on what is happening in the present moment. That could include focusing on your breathing, thinking about your surroundings and a number of other ways that assist you in calming your mind.

There are many apps available for mindfulness too.

3. Hobbies

Saying “get a hobby” might sound silly, but hobbies are good for your mental health. Hobbies can help us structure our time and provide motivation, meet new friends, cope with stress and give you more enjoyment in life.

I find that having hobbies and creative outlets helps me express my feelings and take my mind off of my pain.

4. Animals

Animals can be wonderful for your mental health and can help reduce the effects of chronic pain.

Research shows that pain patients who interacted with therapy dogs reported less stress, pain and better mood than patients who did not. Other studies suggest that petting a pet for even 10 to 15 minutes can reduce the amount of the stress hormone cortisol.

Animals, like dogs, can also make us more active, and light exercise can be great for many of us with chronic pain. For example, taking our pets for a walk can be good for us!

The positivity that animals can bring to our lives is a great distraction from our pain and can do wonders for our mood!

Overview

These are only a handful of chronic pain coping tools. If you are struggling on how to deal with chronic pain and the physical and emotional challenges you are facing, know that there are strategies out there for you.