

## **Chronic Pain**

Pain is described as ‘**An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage**’ (IASP).

Most people experience episodes of acute pain during their life, following an injury or illness. However some people continue to experience persistent (chronic) pain after the expected healing time for recovery. Chronic pain is generally defined as pain which persists beyond the expected time for healing from acute injury or illness, which is usually between 3-6 months. Chronic pain is described in two different ways according to the origin of the pain:

Musculoskeletal Pain – Pain originating in bones and muscles

Neuropathic Pain – Pain initiated or caused by a primary lesion or a dysfunction in the nervous system

Chronic pain can also exist when healing may never occur as in malignant cancer pain.

The prevalence of chronic pain varies across different health populations and diseases but as a guide involves approximately 11% of the population.

### **Treatment for chronic pain**

Chronic pain is a complex constellation of social, emotional and physical experiences which can be difficult to diagnose, treat and manage. For people with chronic pain and high levels of emotional distress and disability, chronic pain affects can impact upon all areas of life including for example, physical, emotional, social, psychological and also spiritual wellbeing.

Many people with chronic pain describe experiencing fluctuating pain levels which may seem difficult to predict, control and manage over the course of time. Like any ongoing illness such as diabetes or arthritis, there are things that people can do to help understand and manage pain and reduce psychological distress.

### **Psychological Assessment**

A detailed psychological assessment helps the person to describe and explain their chronic pain experience, and work together with the psychologist to determine the best treatment option.

Psychological therapy or intervention may comprise one to one individual psychological therapy or, a combined team based approach in conjunction with other specialist health care providers such as physiotherapists and medical pain specialists. Family / whanau may be invited to some appointments as some family members ask what they can do to increase the effectiveness of therapy and provide the best support for the person with chronic pain.

### **Psychological Therapy**

Psychological therapy usually involves a specific treatment or therapy approach for the management of chronic pain. There are several therapy options available depending upon the person's needs and preferences.

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Mindfulness
- Motivational Interviewing
- Stress management
- Exposure based treatment –Interoceptive exposure
- Problem Solving
- Emotional Regulation and Distress Tolerance
- Psychodynamic approaches

### **Pain Interventions**

Psychological therapy for chronic pain often includes many of the following interventions in accordance with the type of therapy offered:

- Understanding chronic pain (psycho-education)
- Pain management techniques (distraction, relaxation, pain transformation, acceptance)
- Understanding and managing emotions (anxiety, depression, stress, fear, anger, frustration, low mood)
- Identifying and treating post-traumatic stress disorder in traumatic injury
- Identifying and managing appropriate levels of activity and pacing
- Managing sleep disturbance
- Understanding effects of diet, alcohol, caffeine
- Supporting effective prescribed medication use and adherence
- Goal setting or identifying values central to the individuals wellbeing
- Re-engagement with family, whanau, friends and social activities
- Resuming participation in work, hobbies interests or meaningful activities
- Addressing interpersonal issues affecting chronic pain