

## Managing Chronic Pain in Internal Medicine: Addressing Physical and Psychological Aspects

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### DESCRIPTION

Chronic pain is a significant medical condition characterized by persistent pain that lasts for more than 3-6 months, or beyond the usual healing time after an injury. It can result from various underlying conditions, including neurological, musculoskeletal, and inflammatory disorders, and is a frequent concern in internal medicine. Chronic pain is not merely a symptom but a complex, multifactorial disease that can severely impair an individual's quality of life, often leading to physical, psychological, and social dysfunction. The mechanisms behind chronic pain are intricate and involve a combination of peripheral and central processes. Initially, an injury or illness triggers the pain response through nociceptors specialized sensory neurons that detect harmful stimuli. In acute pain, these signals are transmitted to the brain and cause a temporary discomfort, which resolves once the underlying injury heals. However, in chronic pain, this process becomes dysfunctional, with pain signals being perpetuated even after the initial cause is resolved. At the peripheral level, chronic pain can result from prolonged inflammation, nerve injury, or sensitization. In conditions like neuropathic pain, nerve damage alters the normal processing of pain signals, leading to heightened sensitivity or pain perception even in the absence of an injury. At the central level, alterations in the spinal cord and brain, including increased excitability and reorganization of neural circuits, contribute to the persistence of pain signals. The interaction between peripheral and central mechanisms in chronic pain often leads to a vicious cycle of pain amplification, making it difficult to treat. The persistent nature of chronic pain often leads to psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. The relationship between chronic pain and mental health is bidirectional; pain can worsen psychological symptoms, while psychological factors such as stress and depression can exacerbate pain perception. This creates a complex interplay where both the body and mind must be addressed in the treatment of chronic pain. Effective management of chronic pain requires a multidisciplinary approach. The treatment plan often combines pharmacologic

and non-pharmacologic interventions to improve function and reduce pain. Medications are commonly used to manage chronic pain. These may include Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) for inflammatory pain, acetaminophen for mild to moderate pain, and opioids for severe pain. However, opioid use is limited due to concerns about dependence, tolerance, and overdose. Antidepressants, anticonvulsants (such as gabapentin), and topical agents may be prescribed for neuropathic pain. A structured physical therapy regimen can help in strengthening muscles, improving flexibility, and enhancing joint mobility, which may alleviate pain, particularly in musculoskeletal conditions like osteoarthritis and back pain. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is often used to help patients manage the psychological components of chronic pain. By altering negative thought patterns, CBT can help patients cope better with pain and reduce the emotional distress it causes. Techniques such as nerve blocks, spinal cord stimulation, or injections of corticosteroids into the affected area may provide relief, particularly in patients who do not respond to medications. Acupuncture, chiropractic care, and massage therapy are some complementary approaches that can provide relief from chronic pain. However, these treatments should be considered adjuncts to more conventional methods. Encouraging patients to maintain a healthy weight, engage in regular low-impact exercises, and adopt relaxation techniques like mindfulness or yoga can significantly contribute to pain management.

### CONCLUSION

Chronic pain is a complex and multifaceted condition that requires a comprehensive treatment approach. It not only impacts the physical aspects of health but also the emotional and psychological well-being of patients. Early diagnosis, effective management, and a multidisciplinary approach are essential to improving outcomes and enhancing the quality of life for individuals suffering from chronic pain. Given the growing prevalence of chronic pain, especially in an aging population, its management remains a central focus in internal medicine.

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