



How to Manage Chronic, Persistent Pain

Pain often has several causes. Sometimes there's no specific cause. Your thoughts and moods can affect how you experience and manage pain.

Pain that lasts 3 months or longer is called persistent pain. It can occur anywhere in your body. The pain can be related to:

- Injuries
- Inflammation
- Nervous system problems (neuropathic pain)
- Hormonal problems

How does pain affect the brain?

When you have an illness or injury, specific nerves send pain signals to your brain. If these signals continue for weeks, months, or even years, you have persistent pain. It goes on long after the original illness or injury has healed.

Persistent pain can cause worry, frustration, and fear. This can lead to other problems, such as:

- Trouble sleeping
- Low energy and inactivity
- Irritability
- Depression
- Increased pain
- Isolation from others

Your home life, work, hobbies, and relationships with family and friends can be affected.

How can I manage persistent pain?

You can use mind-body methods to retrain your brain to manage pain. You may need to try several methods to find what works. These can help even if you're taking medication. You'll feel better and may need less medication.

We may recommend one or more of these methods:

- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and/or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with a pain management psychologist to recognize and reduce unhelpful, self-critical thought patterns.
- Physical therapy to help create a personal exercise program.
- Mindfulness and stress reduction practices to help you become aware of your usual reactions to pain and choose healthy responses. You'll also relearn to feel your body's many sensations that aren't painful.
- Gentle movement practices to ease discomfort and increase enjoyment. Methods include tai chi, yoga, Pilates, Feldenkrais, and mindful walking.
- Acupuncture to stimulate your nervous system to release natural pain-reducing chemicals such as endorphins. An acupuncturist inserts thin, sterile needles into your skin at specific points. Acupuncture works for many types of pain, but not all.

We have resources to help you. If you're interested in our Pain Management Program, ask us to refer you.

What else can I do to manage pain?

Pace yourself

If you're in pain the day after doing specific activities, learn to pace yourself. You can:

- Break large tasks into smaller ones.
- Alternate hard and easy activities.
- Do relaxation exercises.

Learn relaxation, mindful meditation, and stress-reduction skills

Slow deep breathing, meditation, and guided imagery can help. As a Kaiser Permanente member, you can use these tools to learn skills:

- myStrength and Calm apps at kp.org/selfcareapps
- Audio meditations for health at kp.org/podcasts

Try gentle movement and physical therapy

Gentle daily movement helps you reduce pain. Stronger muscles help you be mobile and independent. Keeping active helps distract you from pain. Search kp.org/mydoctor to find gentle movement videos and other exercises to manage pain.

Sleep better

Improving sleep will help reduce your pain. We can connect you with an insomnia program and other resources.

Think positive thoughts

Your thoughts affect your mood, activities, and pain. By noticing your thought patterns, you can choose positive thoughts more often.

Do pleasant activities

Watch a movie, read a book, listen to music, start a new hobby, or spend time with friends. These can be powerful distractions from pain.

Follow your medication plan

Work with your doctor, nurse practitioner, or pain management team to create a medication plan. Don't increase or decrease your medication unless you talk with them first.

Eat healthy foods every day

Eating healthy foods can improve your overall health, help you manage your weight, increase your energy level, reduce inflammation, and promote healing.

Prepare for flare-ups

Pain flare-ups are common. Create and use an action plan to manage flare-ups.

When to call us

Talk with your doctor if pain is affecting your ability to work, stay active, and enjoy life. We'll ask if you've been evaluated or treated by a specialist, and if you have:

- Pain that's new, getting worse, or out of control.
- Problems sleeping due to pain.
- Felt worried or anxious about your pain.
- Depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues.
- Concerns or questions about treatment options, including pain medications.