

# How to Manage Chronic, Persistent Pain

**Pain often has several causes.** Pain that lasts **3 months or longer** and disrupts your quality of life is called **chronic, persistent pain**. It can occur anywhere in the body and the nervous system. Your thoughts and moods can also affect how you experience and manage pain.

## How does the pain system work?

If you experience an injury, inflammation, stress, or pain from other causes, the nerves send pain signals to your brain. When pain lasts more than 3 months, the nerves have become more sensitive or activated.

Because ongoing pain can cause changes in the brain, pain sensations can continue even after the body tissues have healed. In some cases, the brain may interpret something like a light touch or cool breeze as painful, since your brain is continuing to receive these overactive nerve signals. This results in pain that's ongoing or persists.

Many people with persistent pain also report that emotions like frustration, anger, or fear, as well as extra stress, can trigger the body's alarm system and cause pain. 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?

### Pace yourself

If you're in pain the day after doing specific activities, you can pace yourself by:

- Breaking large tasks into smaller ones.
- Alternating hard and easy activities.
- Doing relaxation exercises.

### Try physical therapy

We can help you create a personal exercise program to help reduce pain. Stronger muscles help you be mobile and independent. Keeping active helps distract you from pain.

### Sleep better

Improving sleep will help reduce your pain. We can connect you with an insomnia program and other resources. Learn more about insomnia at [kpdoc.org/sleepemmi](https://kpdoc.org/sleepemmi).

### 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 can improve your overall health, help you manage your weight, increase your energy level, reduce inflammation, and promote healing. Learn more at [kpdoc.org/lifestylemedicine](https://kpdoc.org/lifestylemedicine).

### Prepare for flare-ups

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

## What else can I do to manage pain?

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

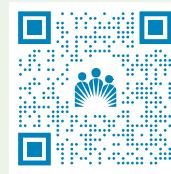
We have resources to help you. We may recommend one or more of these methods:

- **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.
- **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.
- **Gentle movement practices to ease discomfort** and increase enjoyment. Methods include tai chi, yoga, Pilates, Feldenkrais, and mindful walking. Search [kp.org/mydoctor](https://kp.org/mydoctor) with the term "gentle movement" to find videos and other exercises to manage pain.

- **Mindful meditation, guided imagery, relaxation, and stress-reduction practices.** These can help you become aware of your usual reactions to pain and choose healthy, positive responses instead. You'll also relearn to feel your body's many sensations that aren't painful. Learn more at:

- Wellness Resources:

[kp.org/wellnessresources](https://kp.org/wellnessresources)



- Headspace Care and Calm apps:

[kp.org/selfcareapps](https://kp.org/selfcareapps)



If you're interested in our Pain Management Program, ask your doctor for a referral.

## 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. We'll also ask 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

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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