

# For those with chronic pain

*Sometimes pain does not go away, and when it lasts for 3 months or more it is called chronic pain. This brochure describes what happens in your body when pain becomes chronic and what to do to feel as good as possible.*

## What happens in your body when you have been in pain for a long time?

The sensation of pain comes from nerves in the body sending signals to the brain, and we feel no pain until those signals reach the brain. Sometimes the nerves are more sensitive, making you feel the pain even more. Sometimes the body's pain function does not work so well and you still feel pain, even though you no longer have an injury. In healthcare, this is called sensitization or nociplastic pain, which means that the nerves have become hypersensitive. The pain may then feel rather strange, spreading to several parts of the body or coming when you just touch something lightly. You may also feel pain when you are resting.

Sometimes you can feel pain without hurting yourself. You can feel pain when you are stressed, and you can feel stressed when you are in pain. Then the pain and stress can get even worse. Those who are in pain often sleep poorly and those who sleep poorly often have more pain.

Pain, stress and poor sleep can make it more difficult for you to concentrate and can affect your memory. You may also become irritable, sad, tired or anxious.

## Treatment and rehabilitation

It is difficult to treat chronic pain. It may not be possible to completely remove the pain, but with treatment you can reduce it and feel better in general.

### *Medication*

Normal painkillers do not usually work so well for chronic pain and you may have to try other pills. They may help to reduce the pain but they rarely take it away completely. Ask your doctor which painkillers are best for you.

You may sometimes need to take pills to sleep better or treat your anxiety. There are also treatments without medication that can help with chronic pain.

### *Physical activity and exercise*

Many people with pain do not get enough exercise, maybe through fear of increasing the pain, but in fact you may have more pain if you rest too much. Muscles become weaker and the body gets worse at calming the pain. It is important to keep moving as much as possible. Exercise can also reduce stress. When we exercise, the body produces "feel-good substances" which reduce pain and make us feel happier. A physiotherapist can help you understand how your body works and find exercises that are good for you and which you can enjoy doing.

### *Psychological treatment*

It is difficult to be in constant pain and you may need to talk to someone about it. Many people are sad because they can't do much when they are in pain; others get angry or think they have changed as a person. A psychologist can teach you how to relax, not feel so stressed and help you feel better mentally.

### *Everyday life*

If you are in pain, you need to live a healthy life. It is important that you eat healthy food, sleep well, get some exercise and do not drink too much alcohol. It is good to move sometimes and rest other times. Together with a dietitian, an occupational therapist and nurse, you can find good routines that work for you. An occupational therapist can give you advice about different aids and how to make everyday life easier, like when you are doing the dishes or cooking. A counsellor or a rehab coordinator can arrange a meeting with you, the health services, your employer and Försäkringskassan (Social Insurance Agency) if you need it. It can also help your family and friends to talk about how they feel. They can meet someone from the health services if they have any questions or want to know how they can help you.

## Living with chronic pain

For many people, pain goes away after some time, but for others the pain stays for longer. There is still a lot you can do to feel better though, like choosing things that make you feel good and cheer you up. Nerves can become less sensitive with time so that you feel less pain.



Like everyone else, people with chronic pain may get other illnesses. If you feel a new pain that you do not recognize, you should get a check-up just like anyone else.