

Treating Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a fact of life for Sue Schneeberg. She suffers from Rheumatoid Arthritis and when it flares up, every joint in her body aches.

“It’s just it’s so exhausting. It’s like, it’s honestly like having the flu.”

The pain is so bad that Sue often has trouble sleeping, and that makes her pain even worse.

“I try to take my ibuprofen or my naproxen and hope it takes enough of the edge off that I can try to fall asleep, but most days I’m so exhausted that I just fall asleep anyways and I wake up feeling like I was put through a wringer because I’m so stiff.”

For chronic pain sufferers, good sleep habits can help.

“Try to get to bed at a regular time wake up at a regular time, things like that that can all help with good sleep patterns.”

The other thing pain specialists recommend is no “screens” in your bedroom.

“So, no TVs, no cell phones. A lot of that blue light can keep you awake it actually disrupts your REM sleep. And so, you don’t get as restful sleep.”

If simple sleep tips don’t help, your healthcare provider may suggest you do a sleep study, to see if other problems, such as sleep apnea, might be the cause. For John Zemler, chronic pain from a variety of injuries makes it difficult to walk. It didn’t help when a freak accident added to his woes.

“Had my shoelace get caught in an escalator 15 months ago. I didn’t know it. I fell, tore my shoulder got nerve damage and it’s just another brick in the wall.”

John’s nagging pain was depressing. It made it difficult for him to even hold a pencil, to create the artwork he loves.

“After six months, I couldn’t take it anymore and I went to the E.R. and they injected the shoulder with anti-inflammatory and that helped a lot.”

Injections or muscle relaxers are treatment options that can be considered for someone in chronic pain.

“We tend to focus on the non-opioid medications. They can include pain-focused interventions or injections or procedures. They involve physical therapy and occupational therapy. It involves behavioral health.”

Behavioral health therapy is a way of re-focusing your attention away from your pain with the help of a mental health professional.

Treating Chronic Pain

“Getting patients to set goals for things that they want to be able to do like activity goals or you know work goals whatever is important to them and then helping them set realistic expectations for themselves as to how they can achieve those goals.”

Relaxation techniques, yoga, acupuncture, and other alternative therapies, can also help relieve chronic pain.

“I have heard also besides yoga that water exercises are very good because it helps with your joints doesn't put quite as much pressure on them. So, I was thinking about maybe looking into that possibly joining a gym for something like that.”

If you're in pain, it's important to explore all the options for treatment. Living with chronic pain can make you anxious or depressed and, not treating it, can make it worse.

“We certainly know that depression and anxiety both make pain worse, and pain then also makes depression and anxiety worse. So again, that's kind of a vicious cycle that we work with patients to break.”

Each person, each condition will require a different treatment plan, and it might involve a variety of therapies or techniques. If prescription opioids are part of your treatment plan, only take the medications as prescribed by your healthcare provider. If you are concerned you may be addicted to opioids, seek help. For more information, visit [hhs.gov/opioids](https://www.hhs.gov/opioids).

The key is to talk to your healthcare provider and look into different options to find the best ways to relieve your chronic pain, so you can do the things you like to do.