



# Chronic Pain

In partnership with you and your child, we are committed to the *prevention and relief* of pain as completely as possible.

## What is chronic pain?

Pain becomes chronic when it continues over a period of time and no longer serves as a warning signal to protect the body from harm.

Pain signals stem from interactions between the brain and the rest of the body. If the body has been in pain for a long time, the brain can continue sending pain signals even if there is no longer any tissue damage or problems with the body. At this point, pain is no longer a symptom of another problem—pain itself is the condition to be treated.

## Our commitment

In partnership with you and your child, we are committed to the *prevention* and *relief* of pain as completely as possible. Successful management of chronic pain should reduce pain, increase function and improve quality of life.

## How is chronic pain treated?

Chronic pain is complex and is best treated by using a combination of approaches including the following:

### Exercise

Your child needs regular exercise. Non-impact aerobic exercises like swimming, bike riding, or using the elliptical machine are good for almost everybody, but especially for your child. Exercise not only helps to improve the immune system, it also improves the pain relief response from the brain.

### Medicine

For some types of chronic pain, medicines may be used to reduce discomfort. Opioids, which are used for acute pain, are rarely used to treat chronic pain.

### Mood

Mood problems do not cause pain; however they can make pain feel worse. If your child has anxiety, worries, or a depressed mood, treatment can help.

### Normal activities

Attending school, completing chores, and participating in activities are important. These daily responsibilities should not be removed or excused because of pain.

### Physical Therapy

Pain leads to less function which brings more pain. As your child's function improves so will their pain. Therapists trained in pain rehabilitation will provide your child with exercises to improve strength flexibility, mobility and work to make areas of the body less sensitive.

### Procedures

Sometimes procedures may be done to help with pain. This includes nerve blocks and other methods done by an anesthesiologist.

### Self-regulation

Children may be taught to change their experience of pain using techniques involving breathing and imagery. For some children self-hypnosis or biofeedback may also be helpful.

### Sleep

Your child may have a hard time falling or staying asleep. A regular sleep schedule, and in some cases medicines, may help your child. We recommended that your child go to bed at the same time each night, and get up at the same time each day. Your child should only use the bed for sleeping. Homework or watching TV should be done in another location.

You know your child best. We encourage you to take an active part in your child's recovery. Talk with your care team about how your child shows pain and what works to comfort your child.

## How can I help my child with chronic pain?

It is hard to see your child suffer with pain. You may have additional concerns when pain begins to play a central role in your child's life, interfering with normal functioning. Parents need to strike a balance between being sympathetic while also setting limits and encouraging healthier responses. Here are some suggestions:

### Limit attention to pain

When your child complains of pain avoid giving treats or extra sympathy. Instead, encourage problem solving and positive coping behaviors. If your child is in pain and needs to miss school or other important responsibilities, limit special activities like watching TV or playing with friends during this time.

### Encourage participation in normal activities

Support your child in attending school, completing chores, and participating in activities. Do not remove daily responsibilities because of pain.

### Be positive

Notice and praise your child for participation in normal activities. Praise should be specific, highlighting the effective use of coping. This will refocus attention from pain and illness to healthier aspects of your child's life.

### To Learn More

- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- Pain Medicine  
206-987-1520
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers  
206-987-2280 (TTY)

### Encourage your child to manage pain on their own

When your child reports pain, encourage them to problem solve and use the coping strategies that have been learned.

### Rely less on medicines and more on other strategies

Medicines have a limited and specific use in treating chronic pain and should only be used as prescribed. Instead of medicines, your child needs to learn to use other strategies to manage increased pain, all focused on your child having a more active role.

### What to expect

A long-term problem requires a long-term solution. Chronic pain problems have often gone on for weeks to months before treatment is started.

Expecting a sudden remission may not be realistic. We look for consistent, steady progress, not quick solutions.

For most children, pain begins to go away as normal activities are resumed. When you see an increase in day-to-day functioning you will know your child is improving. You will likely then notice changes in the duration of pain, as well as frequency of pain episodes and the intensity of the pain.

### Questions?

All team members are committed to partner with you and your child to improve pain. Let your care team know if you have questions or feedback at any time.