



Combating Chronic Pain

We're not talking about "acute" pain, which happens when your nervous system alerts you that you've stubbed your toe, or hit your thumb with a hammer. Acute pain lasts no longer than a few months.

Chronic pain, however, is ongoing. It can linger for years, or even a lifetime. Chronic pain can be caused from:

- Diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis
- Disorders like fibromyalgia
- Ailments like cancer, stomach ulcers, and multiple sclerosis
- Injuries, nerve damage, backaches, headaches and carpal tunnel

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Combating Chronic Pain *continued*

*Do you feel
persistent pain in
a particular part of
your body for months
on end?*

*Is the pain bearable
on some days, but hard
to handle on others?*

*Does it make
simple, everyday
tasks hard to do?*

Millions of Americans suffer from chronic pain every year, which means a number of SCAN Club readers probably answered “YES” to these questions.

If you are one of them, we understand that living with pain for long periods of time can take a physical and emotional toll, but don’t lose hope—help is available.

Tell your doctor how severe your pain is, and how it affects your life. Your doctor can help you target the cause and discuss options for relief.

Arthritis Pain: What’s the Difference?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and osteoarthritis (OA) both cause chronic pain, but here’s how the two differ:

- RA is an autoimmune condition, which means the body attacks itself. You may experience swelling, inflammation, severe fatigue and lasting joint damage.
- OA is the most common form of arthritis. OA is due to gradual wear and tear of cartilage (cushion) between joints.

There are many pain relief options for osteoarthritis. If over-the-counter remedies no longer work for you, talk to your doctor about prescription medications that can help.

For rheumatoid arthritis, your primary care doctor will likely refer you to a rheumatologist who will confirm your diagnosis and talk about treatment options. Unlike OA, RA can damage more than your joints. Getting RA under control will slow further damage.

The Stress of Chronic Pain

Chronic pain often makes it hard to sleep and can lead to depression or anxiety. Let your doctor know how your pain has affected you mentally and emotionally. A healthy state of mind will help you combat chronic pain!



HOW MEMBERS COMBAT CHRONIC PAIN

The last time we wrote about pain, we invited readers to tell us what they do to manage pain. Here are a few self-help techniques that, if you haven’t tried them yet, have worked for others.

“I have arthritis in my hips and lower back,” Doris wrote. “I found that walking helps. But rather than walking on the cement or uphill, I go to the park and walk the dirt path. People are always around and there are benches if I need to sit.”

Marilyn has osteoporosis, sciatica problems and arthritis in her back. Here’s how she deals with it: “In the morning, I do several repetitions of back and leg stretches. A heating pad on the back during breakfast eases tight muscles. The SilverSneakers class that I attend is a complete workout for cardio, strength training and balance. Other days I walk.” Marilyn believes that her exercise habits lessen her reliance on over-the-counter pain relievers.

Although both of these members find relief in being physically active, check with your doctor if additional activity causes you pain.