

Alternative to Opioids for

Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is often defined as pain that lasts for 3 to 6 months or more. Chronic pain can be caused by certain conditions or past injuries with pain that persists long after injuries have healed. It is not unusual for more than one condition to contribute to high levels of ongoing pain. Examples include low back pain, arthritis, headaches, nerve and muscle pain, and shoulder or neck pain. Research suggests chronic pain is related to changes to the nerves that carry pain signals, which can grow worse over time.

As the pain persists, it can become harder to function at normal levels and may affect all aspects of a person's life. Chronic pain may force people to give up activities they once enjoyed, leading to feelings of isolation and depression. It can interfere with work, sleep, mood, and contribute to relationship difficulties, and lead to overreliance on alcohol and drugs (prescribed or otherwise).

Opioids are not the first or most effective treatment for non-cancer chronic pain.

Managing Chronic Pain

Many people work with their doctors to find medications that offer relief without the risks of opioids. There is more ground to be gained.

A variety of nonopioid medications can be used safely and work well in combination with pain management techniques.

- Non-opioid pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or non-steroidal antiinflammatories (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen (Advil®)
- Some antidepressants and anticonvulsants, which work on the nerve pathways contributing to chronic pain

If opioids are part of your treatment for chronic pain, it is important

to talk with your doctor about other medications you take and how much alcohol you drink. You and your doctor may agree in advance on a plan to gradually discontinue opioids and a pain management contract that limits the amounts and frequency of their use.

Goals of Pain Management

Controlling pain is one of several important goals of pain management.

9 For more information, check out [Chronic Pain Medicines](#) from the American Academy of Family Physicians, which lists risks and benefits of a variety of different medications that are used to treat chronic pain.

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