

**Taking Charge, Living Life:  
Managing Your Chronic Pain**



**Common Questions & Answers  
About Chronic Pain Treatment**

# What is your pain like?

<b>1. What number best describes your <u>pain on average</u> in the past week:</b>										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No pain						Pain as bad as you can imagine				
<b>2. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your <u>enjoyment of life</u>?</b>										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does not interfere						Completely interferes				
<b>3. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your <u>general activity</u>?</b>										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does not interfere						Completely interferes				

## Goals of Pain Therapy

You are not alone! Chronic pain is a very common health problem.

You and your primary care team are partners in treating your pain. It is important to have open and regular contact for this partnership to work.

**The goal of treating chronic pain is to improve function so you can get back to doing daily activities.** You and your provider team will talk about how you are doing on daily activities and then create an individual treatment plan to help you reach your goals.

**It is important to understand that most chronic pain doesn't completely go away, but there are many treatments to help you to manage it and live a full life.**

## **Treatments**

There are many ways to manage your pain. Some of these treatments are medicines, and some are not. Most people find that using a combination of methods works best.

What works for one person may or may not work for another. Pain and treatment are very individual. The #1 concern when treating chronic pain is to find the best and safest treatment for you.

## **One Provider Team & One Pharmacy for All Medicines**

Medicines often help us, but they can hurt us if we take the wrong amount or if we take ones that do not work well together (called a drug interaction). This is why it is best to get all of your prescriptions from one provider team and to use only one pharmacy to fill them.

Also, using the same pharmacy will let the pharmacists check for drug interactions and for duplication (taking two medicines with the same ingredients that might hurt you).

Many provider teams require patients to sign an agreement where you agree to not get opiate medications from other providers, or from the ER.



## **Opioid Safety**

Opioid pain medicine is often prescribed to help treat chronic pain. It has benefits, but also risks. Many people who take opioids get side effects.

It is important to follow directions exactly. Taking extra or mixing opioids with alcohol, cold medicine, or street drugs could cause you to stop breathing or die.

Some side effects are constipation, low sex drive, itching, headache, dry mouth, nausea, or feeling very tired. Most of the side effects get better with time. Most people also need to take a medicine or natural remedy to treat constipation if they take pain meds every day.

If you feel side effects that bother you, talk to your team. If you think it's an emergency, call 911.

## **Urine Drug Screening**

If you are prescribed medicine for your pain, your provider team might order a urine drug screen for you. This is not because anyone thinks you are doing anything wrong. It is simply a standard protocol at the clinic.

Why? Your provider team needs to know that the medicine is safe for you.

No one is singled out: everyone has to do this for safety. Your safety is the most important part of treatment.



## **Pain Management Agreements**

Patients have a big responsibility when using opioids. Part of managing pain with medicines means learning about the medicines and owning your actions. This is called self-management.

A pain management agreement is a form that explains your treatment plan (that you and your provider team have decided on together) and all of the rules for it. You and your provider team read the form at the same time and everyone signs it. By signing the agreement, everyone agrees to follow it.

It describes what you can expect from your provider team and what your provider team expects of you. Most provider teams have a common set of guidelines that you will need to follow, such as keeping your appointments, taking your medication as prescribed, only getting meds from one provider, avoiding street drugs, and not asking for early refills. The agreement will also explain the consequences if you don't follow what you agree to do.

By signing a pain agreement along with your provider team, you are both putting on paper your commitment to communication, trust, and honesty.

## Ways to Manage Chronic Pain

Taking medicine is just one part of managing chronic pain. Many people also use other treatments. These include exercise (start slowly), getting emotional support or therapy, and learning to manage stress.

- **Acupuncture** is a form of Chinese medicine. It involves inserting very thin needles into the skin at certain points of the body. The goal is to change the body's energy flow so it can heal itself.
- **Guided Imagery** is like a relaxing daydream. You close your eyes and create images in your mind to help you relax. You can use all of your senses. You might think of a place or activity that made you happy in the past.
- **Massage** may help reduce pain and fatigue. It is pressing, rubbing, and kneading parts of the body with hands. It may also help boost blood flow.
- **Meditation** helps relax the body and quiet the mind. It may help with pain, and with worry, stress, or depression. When you meditate, you focus attention on a word or phrase, an object, or your breath. You can sit, lie down, or walk. The goal while meditating is to have an open attitude toward outside thoughts or emotions. When they come in, you acknowledge them, and then gently bring your attention back to regular breathing.



- **Mindful Relaxation** lowers pain by getting rid of tension in your muscles. It may help you sleep, manage stress, and give you more energy. Common methods are visual focus (staring at something), breathing and muscle tensing (inhaling while tensing muscles, then exhaling while relaxing muscles), and slow breathing while focusing on an object.
- **Physical Therapy and Physical Activity.** Exercises to help build strength, increase movement, and lower pain. Walking is a great form of exercise that can keep you strong and flexible, and help improve pain.
- **Reiki.** A form of energy medicine in which the provider places his/her hands on or near the patient. The goal is to pass on energy called qi.
- **Tai Chi.** A practice that is a series of slow, gentle movements with a focus on breath and awareness.
- **Yoga.** Stretches and poses with special focus on breathing. There are many types of yoga.
- **Pain Support Groups.** Groups that offer support, community, connection to others, and education in pain management and life skills.
- **Injections.** Steroid injections may give you short-term relief of some pain.
- **Surgeries.** Not a very common treatment and usually considered only after other treatments have failed.
- **Medication.** Nerve blocks, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines, and opioids.



**Ask your provider for more information on these services.** You can do some of them by yourself. For others, you have to see a specialist. There are many free and low-cost options in San Francisco.



Dana Harrell-Sanders, [painexhibit.org](http://painexhibit.org)