



# Managing Your Chronic Pain

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Taking Charge, Living Life



# Taking **Charge,** **Living** Life

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# What is your pain like?

1. What number best describes your **pain on average** in the past week:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No pain						Pain as bad as you can image				

2. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain gets in the way with your **enjoyment of life**?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does not get in the way						Always gets in the way				

3. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain gets in the way with your **general activity**?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does not get in the way						Always gets in the way				



## 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 talk often with your care team for this partnership to work.

**Treating your pain can help you get back to your daily activities.** You and your provider team will talk about how you are doing on daily activities. Then you will create an individual treatment plan to help you reach your goals.

**Keep in mind 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 deal with your pain. Some of these treatments are medicines, and some are not. Most people find that using a mixture of methods works best.

What works for one person may or may not work for someone else. 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 and One Pharmacy for All Medicines

Medicines often help us, but they can hurt us if we take the wrong amount. They can also be dangerous if they 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. This is when you could be taking two medicines with the same ingredients that might hurt you.

Many provider teams need patients to sign a pain agreement. This is where you agree to not get opiate medications from other providers, or from the ER.

# 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. This is the plan that you and your provider team have decided on together. It also lays out all of the rules you have agreed on. You and your care 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 rules 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 with your provider team, you are both putting on paper your commitment to communication, trust, and honesty.



# 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. The screening results are kept confidential as part of your medical record.

# 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 include:

- constipation
- low sex drive
- itching
- headache
- dry mouth
- nausea
- 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.

Opioids can also cause bad reactions that make your breathing slow or even stop. This can happen if your body can't handle the opioids that you take that day.

To avoid an accidental opioid overdose:

- Don't mix your opioids with alcohol, benzodiazepines (Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Valium), or medicines that make you sleepy.
- Be extra careful if you miss or change doses, feel ill, or start new medications.



# Naloxone

**If you take strong pain medications, ask your provider for Naloxone.** Naloxone is an antidote sprayed into the nose. It should be used if you are too sleepy or can't be woken up due to these pain medications. It is an important way to keep you and your family safe. Talk to your provider for more information.

For more information and videos, visit: [www.prescribetoavoid.org](http://www.prescribetoavoid.org)



# 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, 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 may provide relief.

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. Visit [www.sfhp.org](http://www.sfhp.org) for a listing of local resources.



## List all of your medications

1	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
2	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
3	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
4	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
5	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
6	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
7	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
8	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
9	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:
10	Medication name:
	Prescribing doctor:



