

Living Well with Chronic Pain

WHAT IS IT?

This is a group-based, participatory class led by two trained peer leaders over six weekly sessions. Participants learn about effective, nonpharmacological strategies for symptom management and general wellness. They use action-planning, brainstorming, and problem-solving to identify and pursue health and life goals. Topics include techniques for dealing with frustration, fatigue, isolation, and poor sleep; exercises for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility, and endurance; appropriate use of medications; communicating with family and friends; nutrition; pacing activity and rest; and evaluating new treatments. Developed in Canada in the late 1990s, this program adapts the Arthritis and Chronic Disease Self-Management programs to focus specifically on chronic pain.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The program is for any adult (age >18) with a primary or secondary diagnosis of chronic pain (e.g., pain lasting longer than three to six months or beyond the normal healing of an injury). It is valuable for patients with chronic musculoskeletal pain (e.g., LBP), fibromyalgia, and/or neuropathic pain. Participants must be able to engage in group discussions. It is not appropriate for individuals who will disrupt group dynamics or for those acutely incapacitated by severe illness or physical limitations. The program is ideal for patients who feel socially isolated and/or depressed due to pain.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

This program, an adaptation of the Arthritis and Chronic Disease Self-Management programs, addresses the day-to-day challenges of living with chronic pain. It focuses on increasing participants' self-efficacy, improving knowledge, and assessing beliefs that contribute to the perception of pain, leading to behavior change and improved self-management. The initial randomized controlled trial (RCT) among patients with mixed idiopathic chronic pain conditions (110 individuals; 75% female, average age 40) showed significant short-term improvements in pain, vitality, energy, dependency, aspects of role functioning, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and resourcefulness compared to wait-list controls. A more recent RCT of an adapted version for patients with stable angina showed similar benefits. However, the largest body of evidence supporting the program's effectiveness is indirect, centered on the core curriculum and effects on pain of the Arthritis and Chronic Disease Self-Management programs.

HOW TO DISCUSS WITH PATIENTS

Chronic pain is a biopsychosocial problem. What the pain does to a patient's life is often more important to the patient than the physical hurt. When discussing the program with patients, approach the conversation with optimism, empathy, and excitement. Understand that managing chronic pain involves significant challenges, such as balancing healthcare, changing behaviors, and managing symptoms. Acknowledge these struggles and express that you understand their difficulties. Share your excitement about the program's potential to help them. Highlight that the program leaders are peers who have faced similar challenges and found great value in the group classes. Many patients like them have experienced significant improvement. Let your patient know you expect them to return with new strategies, goals, and questions, and that you'll use this opportunity to tailor their treatment plan and support their efforts. Emphasize that the program is both safe and enjoyable. Encourage patients to bring a friend, family member, or caregiver to attend with them. This can help involve others in addressing their needs, concerns, and motivations. Promote the program as a way to connect with others who share similar concerns. Emphasize the opportunity for peer support, sharing experiences, and building a support network. Explain how the skills and knowledge gained can directly benefit their daily routine and overall well-being.



What participants say:

"I found a lot of value in the program. The information covered in the textbook and weekly slides was approachable and applicable, helping me to take action in managing my condition. Meeting with others who were experiencing pain helped me to feel less alone as we all learned from one another. This program empowered me to better self-manage and understand my condition."

- 98% were satisfied with the quality of the program
- 97% would recommend this program to a friend or family member
- 84% were satisfied with the leader(s) of the program



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