

# Non-Drug Ways to Manage Your Chronic Pain

When adults are living with chronic pain, it is recommended that they first try non-drug pain management methods and/or non-opioid pain medications. Many people use more than one method to manage pain. When used alone, opioids can be ineffective and come with serious side effects and risks.

## Physical

Psychological

Preventive



The human body has a natural ability to manage pain. Physical methods of pain management involve using your own body to help reduce pain. There are many ways to do this, such as on your own through movement or with the help of a health care provider who can perform a therapy on your body. Exercise, acupuncture, and manual therapy are some physical methods that may help to safely manage chronic pain.

**“Having chronic pain at such a young age I thought physical activity would be a rare occurrence for me. Little did I know, staying active is what helps me attain a normal everyday life.”**

– Nikki Cooke



### Exercise

Exercise is good for you. It also helps reduce chronic pain. Depending on your type of pain, some movements may be easier for you than others. You may prefer aerobic exercise, like walking or swimming. Or, you may prefer strength-based exercises, like weightlifting or resistance training. A general rule of thumb is to begin with gentle movements and gradually build up your tolerance. Find a movement that you enjoy. Talk with your health care provider about what exercises might work for you.

**Research shows exercise may lower pain for people with many types of chronic pain, such as:**

- low back pain
- knee osteoarthritis
- hip osteoarthritis
- fibromyalgia
- rheumatoid arthritis
- neck pain.



### Acupuncture

Acupuncture has been used to treat pain in China for thousands of years. It is thought that acupuncture needles cause the body to release natural chemicals that lower our perception of pain. Acupuncture should only be performed by a health care provider who has received appropriate training.

**Research shows acupuncture may lower pain for people with:**

- low back pain
- osteoarthritis
- hip osteoarthritis
- headache
- shoulder pain
- pelvic pain syndrome or prostatitis (inflamed prostate)
- sciatica
- myofascial pain.



### Manual Therapy

Manual therapy is a treatment where a health care provider uses their hands to manipulate and mobilize parts of the body. It can also involve the rubbing and kneading of muscles and joints, which is known as massage therapy. Manual therapies can help you to relax and control your pain, and are performed by a trained health care provider, such as a physiotherapist, massage therapist, or chiropractor.

**Research shows manual therapy may lower pain for people with:**

- low back pain (spine manipulation and massage)
- neck pain (massage)
- tension headaches (spine manipulation).



You may not see your type of pain listed. It doesn't mean these methods to manage pain won't work for you. It may simply mean research has not been done or reviewed on this type of pain yet. In addition, if you do have one of the pain conditions listed, exercise, acupuncture, and/or manual therapy may not help you achieve the lowering of pain that you hope. Everybody responds differently to pain management methods, and you need to find the methods that work best for you. Ask your health care provider about options you can use to manage your pain. For more ways to do so without medication, see the handouts on psychological and preventive methods.

To access a PDF of this handout visit: [www.cadth.ca/chronicpain](http://www.cadth.ca/chronicpain)

**Acknowledgments:** CADTH would like to thank the Saskatchewan Health Authority's Department of Pain Strategy for its clinical expertise in reviewing and informing development of the Non-Drug Ways to Manage Your Chronic Pain handouts. CADTH would also like to thank SaskPain for its assistance with identifying individuals living with chronic pain who reviewed the handouts. Finally, a special thanks to the individuals (full names at [cadth.ca/chronicpain](http://cadth.ca/chronicpain)) who reviewed and contributed to the handouts.

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September 2020

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