

# 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



There are ways you can manage your pain and prevent it from getting worse. These methods may also help prevent pain from leading to other health problems. Using splints or braces, keeping a healthy weight, and wearing foot orthotics are some preventive methods that may help you safely manage chronic pain.

**“After being pregnant my foot shape changed and I found I was injuring myself more often. I didn’t realize this was something that could be corrected. Once I began wearing my orthotics every day I was in a completely different space mentally and physically felt much better. Overall the orthotics have really helped.”**

– Theingry Sundberg



## Splints and Braces

Splints and braces can help with healing, pain, and preventing damage to other parts of the body. These tools are made up of stiff or flexible material and are intended to support or restrict movement of an injured body part. For example, a wrist brace may help reduce chronic pain in that joint. Splints and braces can be bought from a store or custom made. A trained health care provider can give you advice on options for you and your specific type of pain.

**Research shows splinting or bracing may lower pain for people with:**

- tennis elbow
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- osteoarthritis of the thumb or fingers
- osteoarthritis of the wrist.



## Healthy Weight

Keeping a healthy weight has a number of health benefits, many of which can help improve overall health and decrease pain, as being overweight or underweight can increase pain. There are many strategies to help keep a healthy weight, such as eating healthy foods that you like and getting into the habit of regular exercise. Medical conditions and different medications may impact your weight. Talk to your health care provider about ways to help keep a healthy weight.

**Research shows keeping a healthy weight through diet and exercise may lower pain for people who have:**

- low back pain and are overweight
- knee osteoarthritis and are overweight.



## Foot Orthotics

Foot orthotics (or insoles) are used for support and to help ensure the feet are in the proper position. They can also be used to prevent or control foot deformities. Using foot orthotics may help reduce pain in the foot or in other parts of your body. They can be bought from a store or custom made to fit your foot. Talk with your health care provider about the best option for you.

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

- low back pain
- rheumatoid arthritis (with foot pain)
- painful flexible flatfoot.



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, splints or braces, maintaining a healthy weight, and/or foot orthotics 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 physical 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.

## Questions or comments about CADTH or this tool?



Online:  
[cadth.ca](http://cadth.ca)



Twitter:  
[@CADTH\\_ACMTS](https://twitter.com/CADTH_ACMTS)



Email:  
[requests@cadth.ca](mailto:requests@cadth.ca)



New at CADTH Newsletter:  
[cadth.ca/subscribe](http://cadth.ca/subscribe)

### DISCLAIMER

This material is made available for informational purposes only and no representations or warranties are made with respect to its fitness for any particular purpose; this document should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice or for the application of professional judgment in any decision-making process. Users may use this document at their own risk. The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the contents of this document. CADTH is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or injury, loss, or damage arising from or relating to the use of this document and is not responsible for any third-party materials contained or referred to herein. Subject to the aforementioned limitations, the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Health Canada, Canada's provincial or territorial governments, other CADTH funders, or any third-party supplier of information. This document is subject to copyright and other intellectual property rights and may only be used for non-commercial, personal use or private research and study.

### ABOUT CADTH

CADTH is an independent, not-for-profit organization responsible for providing Canada's health care decision-makers with objective evidence to help make informed decisions about the optimal use of drugs and medical devices in our health care system.

CADTH receives funding from Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments, with the exception of Quebec.

September 2020

**CADTH** Evidence  
Driven.

[cadth.ca](http://cadth.ca)