

9 Ways to Tame Your Chronic Pain



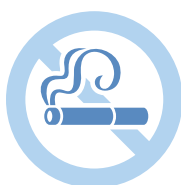
1. Take deep breaths. The average adult takes 8 to 16 breaths a minute. Slowing that down to 5 or 6 deep breaths that really fill your lungs will help you relax, which can lessen your discomfort.



2. Get a good night's sleep. Without enough rest, pain triggers may worsen. So how much sleep is enough? It varies by person, but most adults need 7 to 8 hours a night. The simple answer: however much you need to wake up rested and rejuvenated.



3. Exercise regularly. Get the big 3 — stretching, strengthening and aerobic activity — into your routine 3 to 5 days a week for at least 30 minutes. Stretching keeps muscles limber and tendons elongated. Strengthening core muscles in your back, pelvis, hips and abdomen aids balance and stability. Aerobic activity works the most important muscle, your heart, and stimulates circulation.



4. Tackle your tobacco habit. Smoking cigarettes or cigars decreases circulation, aggravates medical conditions, increases sensitivity to pain and may interfere with pain medication. Same goes for chewing tobacco.



5. Practice “mindfulness meditation.”

This involves observing your pain rather than suppressing it. It sounds crazy, but by relaxing and accepting discomfort, you may better tolerate it. So for 20 minutes a day, sit or lie in a comfortable position in a quiet spot and just be aware, moment by moment, of your breathing, the unfolding of sensations (including pain), and your thoughts and feelings.



6. Eat a whole-food, plant-based diet.

A healthy diet promotes circulation, curbs inflammation and may soothe aching muscles and joints. Base meals on whole or minimally processed foods like vegetables, 100% whole grains, legumes and fruits. Start by ditching the worst offenders: processed meats, red meats and refined carbohydrates like sugar, white bread and pasta.



7. Try yoga. Yoga can quiet your breathing, reduce muscle tension and energize your body and mind, all of which can ease pain. And you don't have to be a yoga master to reap rewards: Plenty of beginner poses are found online, including the warrior pose, mountain pose, child's pose and more.



8. Indulge your hobbies. Take part in activities that bring you pleasure, whether gardening, fishing, cruising garage sales or carving wood. There's a hobby for everyone that can reduce stress and take one's mind off the pain.



9. Be social. People who interact with others tend to reduce anxiety and better manage chronic pain. So have lunch with co-workers, take on a special group project, cheer on your grandson at a soccer game or go to an arts festival.

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American Chronic Pain Association (theapca.org) | American Psychological Association (apa.org/helpcenter/chronic-pain.aspx) | UpToDate® (uptodate.com/contents/chronic-pain-the-basics)
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