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GITA MIKAL | Feb 09, 2012 - 6:13 AM | [Report a Typo or Correction](#)  
**LESS PAIN, MORE GAIN: Chronic pain - understand it and manage it**

Due to an extremely rare genetic disorder, a small number of people in the world are unable to feel pain. For the rest of us, pain is a universal experience in different degrees from mild to severe to unbearable.

Pain is produced by the brain in response to a perceived threat: pain is how the brain interprets messages it receives from body organs and tissues and is associated with many causes ranging from injuries such as muscle strains, to conditions such as arthritis or diseases such as cancer.

Some people would say not feeling pain is a good thing, but it's not.

Ideally, pain is there for a reason - pain alerts you when there is an injury and tells you something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Imagine if you continue walking on a fractured ankle or don't feel anything when your appendix is infected. Pain serves a purpose.

Acute pain is caused by tissue damage such as an ankle sprain, a back injury or an infection.

Acute pain usually doesn't last longer than three to six months since it usually takes that long for the damaged tissue to heal, therefore pain goes away.

If only it were that simple. In about 20 per cent of people, pain doesn't go away when the tissue damage isn't the main issue anymore. This ongoing sensation is then called chronic or persistent pain and is caused by the sensitivity of nervous system, which includes nerve fibres, spinal cord and the brain.

Chronic pain is considered to be a disease on its own and needs to be managed like any other disease.

Small and larger nerve fibres convey different sensations such as touch, temperature and pressure to the spinal cord and then on to the brain.

It's the brain that ultimately produces pain in response to the location and intensity of these messages.

Having a nervous system on fire and a brain that continuously produces pain regardless of the message received is no one's idea of fun.

But that is exactly what happens in a patient with chronic pain - a light touch by a feather on skin or a breeze may feel like having a torch pointed on skin.

Chronic pain is a complex issue and many factors contribute to the severity of it.

Understanding pain and recognizing contributing factors can give a broad personal perspective and give many opportunities to pave the path to healing by developing an effective management plan to quiet one's nervous system and retrain the pain producing brain.

Up to recent years, pain management plans only involved medical approaches such as medication and surgery. Medication can help, but only to a limited extent and ideally should be tapered and ceased.

We now know more comprehensive approaches are necessary for a successful pain management plan.

Here are the most important factors and how to address them:

- Like pain, thoughts and emotions are products of the brain and have a big impact on stress level. One can learn how to decrease the stress level, which combats hopelessness, helps with emotional well-being and can reduce pain.

- Lifestyle can well affect how we feel pain and how to manage it. Diet, smoking, drinking and activity level may really be contributing to a sensitized nervous system.

- Pain experience is as individual as the person. There is enormous value in looking back to the time of developing or intensifying pain, which may reveal profound contributing factors such as trauma, financial stress, work and family issues.

- Last, but not least is the importance of physical activity and function. Improved general fitness level, better posture and increased core strength can help to restore and restructure the body.

There will be less fear of increased pain and re-injury and more confidence in participating in enjoyable social activities with family and friends. From the brain's perspective, getting moving in a comfortable level and without fear is best.

So get help from a professional who can assist you to develop and follow a plan and start living with less pain.

Note: This information should not be used as a substitute for necessary consultations with a qualified health-care professional. Always consult a medically trained professional with questions and concerns you have regarding your medical condition.

Check out this link for more information about pain:

<http://youtu.be/4b8oB757DKc>

Gita Mikal is the founder of Pain Management and Fibromyalgia Centre and Physiotherapy at Don Mills, in North York. Gita is a practicing physiotherapist with post-graduate training in pain management. She incorporates a variety of therapeutic techniques such as manual therapy, acupuncture and pain education in her treatments. For more information on pain management and available treatment options, visit [www.phystoaldonmills.com](http://www.phystoaldonmills.com), or call 416-444-4800.

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