



The APA Valuing Skills Series

Chronic pain



Your pain pathway towards improved health

This fact sheet aims to provide you with a path towards effective pain management. It is important to remember that every individual's experience of pain is unique and what works for one person may not work for another.

Always consult with healthcare professionals to find the best treatment plan for you.

The heavy toll of pain



You are not alone

1 in 5
Australians across all ages experiences **chronic pain.**



Chronic pain costs an estimated **\$139 billion annually.**

Beyond the financial implications, there is a **substantial personal cost.**

Living with chronic pain can take a toll on your health and wellbeing.

It can limit your mobility, affect your mood, disrupt your sleep and **impact your overall quality of life.**

Low back pain is the health condition with the greatest impact on Australian society.

Managing chronic low back pain is not just about reducing costs, but about improving health outcomes and **enhancing quality of life** for those affected.

This is why finding effective, low-risk treatments is so crucial.

Surgical and non-surgical treatment approaches

Chronic pain is complicated. There are many forms of treatment and it can be difficult for patients to make an informed decision. Discussions in the media about the relative merit of medications, surgery and other medical interventions (such as injections, radiofrequency treatment or spinal cord stimulation) compared to 'conservative' interventions such as physiotherapy are often emotional rather than evidence-based.

There is a role for medications in certain circumstances and this requires a detailed consultation with your GP or medical pain specialist. The guidelines for prescription of medications* emphasise that they should only ever be used in conjunction with conservative approaches (such as physiotherapy) to improve function.

Similarly, surgical procedures such as spinal fusion and the implantation of spinal cord stimulators may be appropriate in certain circumstances. However, these procedures should only be considered after a multidisciplinary assessment has been conducted and a collaborative team meeting has occurred to discuss an appropriate treatment plan. The patient should always be informed of the potential risks and benefits and of alternative treatment options available. In other words, surgical procedures should only take place after a comprehensive assessment, including input from your physiotherapist.

*Australian Pain Society Position Statement on Pain Management 2017.



Physiotherapy for the management of chronic pain

For many years, a team-based approach to the management of chronic pain, including low back pain, has been recommended as best practice. Current and previous clinical guidelines for chronic pain management stress the need for an integrated team and physiotherapists have always been part of that team. They work with you to manage pain, improve mobility and enhance your quality of life.

Your physiotherapist will work with you to maximise non-pharmaceutical pain relief.



It is important to seek the clinical opinion of a physiotherapist prior to any interventional surgical procedure such as spinal cord stimulation or lumbar fusion. Often the physiotherapist can provide clarity regarding your pain and the various management options that are evidence-based and indicated for your specific presentation. If you do proceed with a surgical intervention, a physiotherapist should be involved with you afterwards to maximise your gains from the procedure.



The physiotherapist will take a history, conduct a physical examination and discuss what you understand about your problem and what your goals are. Improving your knowledge of the problem and working together to determine the best strategies to control pain and improve movement usually make a significant difference.



A team is frequently very important. Your physiotherapist will collaborate with you and with others in the healthcare team. For patients with more complex pain situations, your physiotherapist might refer you to a physiotherapist with extra expertise, such as a titled or specialist physiotherapist. Discuss this with your physiotherapist if you think it might be appropriate.

Go to [choose.physio/find-a-physio](https://www.choosephysio.gov.au) if you would like to access the advice and healthcare of a physiotherapist.



References:

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