Chronic pain in older adults

The likelihood of experiencing chronic pain increases with age. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 15% of Americans over the age of 65 use a prescription pain relief drug. This infographic provides information about chronic pain in older adults and strategies for treating chronic pain.

What is Chronic Pain?

Pain can either be acute (short lasting) or chronic (persistent, lasting more than 3 months) and can be accompanied by depression and anxiety.

Did you Know?
An estimated 65% of US adults over the age of 65 report suffering from pain and up to 30% of older adults report suffering from chronic pain.

Preventing and Treating Chronic Pain

Percentage of older Americans suffering from chronic pain conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back or Neck Pain</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Joint Pain</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nerve Pain</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migraine or Headache</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
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Studies show acupuncture can improve function in patients suffering from neck pain.

Prevent or Relieve Pain by:
- Maintaining a Healthy Weight
- Getting Enough Sleep
- Avoiding Tobacco

Physical activity can reduce pain and improve function in patients with chronic low back pain and osteoarthritis.

Important Information About Pain Medicines

Using medicine at the first sign of pain may help control pain now and later. Some medicines used to treat pain are:
- Acetaminophen
- Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs
- Narcotics
  - With aging, the risk of side effects associated with medicines increases.
  - Talk with your doctor if you take multiple medicines or have other chronic conditions.
  - Only take the dose of medicine prescribed by your doctor and in the form prescribed.
  - Contact your doctor if you cannot swallow pills.
  - Make sure your doctor knows how much of every medicine or supplement you take and how much alcohol you drink.
  - Ask your pharmacist about any side effects of your medications and when you should speak with your doctor about them.

Complementary & Integrative Approaches for Chronic Pain include:
- Acupuncture
- Massage Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Did you know?
Someone with Alzheimer’s disease may not be able to tell you they’re in pain. Look for signs such as facial expressions, mood and behavior changes, or sleep disturbances which may indicate someone is in pain. See www.nia.nih.gov/health/pain-you-can-get-help for more information.

Learn More:
- Chronic Pain in Older Adults: https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/pain-you-can-get-help
- Complementary & Integrative Health Approaches: https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm

Adapted from Ferrell et al. J Am Geriatr Soc. 1990

55% of older adults in long-term care facilities have daily function impacted by chronic pain.

58% of older adults in long-term care facilities say chronic pain impacts their daily function.

41% of older adults in long-term care facilities who suffer from chronic pain do not impact their daily function.

18% of older adults in long-term care facilities suffer from chronic pain that does not impact their daily function.

5% of older adults in long-term care facilities suffer from chronic pain.

50% of older adults in long-term care facilities experience daily function impacted by chronic pain.

55% of older adults in long-term care facilities say they have daily function impacted by chronic pain.

11% of older adults in long-term care facilities say chronic pain impacts their daily function.

10% of older adults in long-term care facilities say chronic pain impacts their daily function.

6% of older adults in long-term care facilities say chronic pain impacts their daily function.