Chronic (Long Lasting) Pain

Pain is triggered in your nervous system to alert you to possible injury. Chronic pain is different. Chronic pain is long standing and persistent. Pain signals keep firing in the nervous system from weeks to years. There may have been a problem, such as:

- A sprained back.
- A serious infection.
- Arthritis or cancer.

Some people suffer chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage. Many chronic pain conditions affect older adults.

SYMPTOMS

- Headache.
- Low back pain.
- Cancer pain.
- Arthritis pain.
- Neurogenic pain (pain which is coming from the nerves).
- Psychogenic pain (pain which starts out in our mind without a known cause).

TREATMENT

There are many treatments for chronic pain:

- Medications.
- Physical therapy.
- Acupuncture.
- Local electrical stimulation.
- Brain stimulation.
- Surgery.
- Psychotherapy.
- Relaxation, meditation therapies.
- Biofeedback.
- Hypnosis.
- Mental imagery.
- Behavior modification.

PROGNOSIS

Many people with chronic pain can be helped when they understand all the causes of pain and the different steps that can be taken to undo what chronic pain has done.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

- Tests with chronic pain patients have found that they often have lower-than-normal levels of endorphins in their spinal fluid. Endorphins are hormones produced by the body which help with feelings of well being and pain control.
- Research on acupuncture include wiring the needles to stimulate nerve endings electrically (*electroacupuncture*). Some researchers believe such treatments activate endorphin systems. Other research with acupuncture has shown that there are higher levels of endorphins in cerebrospinal fluid following acupuncture.
- Investigators are studying the effect of stress on the experience of chronic pain.
- Chemists are inventing new pain relievers (*analgesics*) and finding pain-killing effects in drugs not normally prescribed for pain.

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