



Chronic Pain and Mental Health

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Introduction

Most of us at some point in our lives have experienced pain significant enough to affect our moods and well-being. For example, the pain may have been bad enough to keep us awake at night and consequently caused us to feel irritable the following day. Perhaps more intense and longer lasting pain has kept us from pursuing hobbies, exercise, or social engagements, leading to feelings of isolation. Even worse, the pain may have interfered with our ability to complete essential daily living tasks, such as dressing ourselves or preparing meals, stealing our independence. It is



understandable that the limitations moderate-to-severe chronic pain impose on our lives may result in feelings of depression or anxiety.

It is then no surprise studies show people with chronic pain (compared to those without) are more likely to have mood disorders and anxiety. What may be less obvious but equally as important is people diagnosed with mental health disorders (compared to those without) are more likely to develop chronic pain. These findings demonstrate

the significant link between chronic pain and mental health disorders, especially depression and anxiety. In fact, the medical literature goes so far as to suggest having one of these conditions can contribute to and exacerbate the other.

The effects of pain on mental health

Depression is marked by feelings of sadness and hopelessness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, fatigue, and frustration. Those with anxiety may feel irritable, tense, and restless. The physiologic stress response to chronic pain and its byproducts, including loss of restorative sleep and avoidance of physical activities only further exacerbates the symptoms already associated with mental health conditions.

The effects of mental health on pain

The physiologic responses to pain cause inflammation and muscle tension. The benefits of restorative sleep, optimal mobility, and exercise to mitigate chronic pain may be hampered by the ill-effects of mental health disorders. Thus, a vicious cycle of emotional distress and physical pain, each compounding the other, ensues.

Treatment of chronic pain with mental health disorders

A multimodal treatment approach should be considered when treating painful conditions complicated by mental health

disorders. Treatment should focus on managing the pain and its underlying problem, if there is one, in addition to treating the mental health disorder. Self-help strategies that may alleviate pain and lessen mental health symptoms include routine exercise, improved sleeping environment, anti-inflammatory diet, meditation, and support groups. Professional treatment may include interventional pain management, medication management (especially antidepressants and anticonvulsants), physical therapy, chiropractic treatment, massage therapy, acupuncture, and surgery. Additionally, psychological treatment with cognitive behavioral therapy, biofeedback, and medication management (especially antidepressants and anticonvulsants) may be beneficial.

Conclusion

In summary, research has shown the association between chronic pain and mental health disorders and their detrimental impact on one another. Be sure to inform your providers not only of your physical pain but also the influence it has had on your mood and well-being because a multidisciplinary pain management approach optimizes one's success for relief.

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- Double Board Certified in Pain Medicine and Anesthesiology
- Earned his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean and completed his clinical courses in Epsom, England
- Anesthesiology Residency at Jackson Memorial Hospital / University of Miami
- Completed his fellowship in Pain Management at the University of Virginia
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