

Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week

Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a devastating neurological disorder that affects almost 90 million Americans.

What is chronic pain?

- * It is pain that continues after your body has healed from an injury or illness and lasts longer than three months.
- * Chronic pain may not have an identifiable physical cause because certain brain chemicals that suppress pain may not be working properly.
- * It can occur anywhere in your body and ranges from mild to severe.

What are the symptoms of chronic pain?

- * The pain may be described as shooting, burning or aching discomfort, soreness, tightness and stiffness. Along with on-going pain, other symptoms of chronic pain include: fatigue, depression, withdrawal from social/physical activities and a weakened immune system.
- * Common chronic pain complaints come from headaches, the lower back, cancer and arthritis. Other complaints are neurogenic (pain resulting from damage to the peripheral nerves or to the central nervous system itself) and psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside or outside the nervous system).
- * Clinical investigators have tested chronic pain patients and found that they often have lower-than-normal levels of endorphins in their spinal fluid.
- * Following injury, the nervous system undergoes a tremendous reorganization called plasticity. The dramatic changes that occur with injury and persistent pain underscore that chronic pain should be considered a disease of the nervous system, not just prolonged acute pain or a symptom of an injury. A new study shows that two proteins in the brain trigger the neuronal changes that amplify and sustain chronic pain.

What is the treatment for chronic pain?

- * Early treatment is best. It may take several types or combinations of treatments before an effective one is found. The pain may reflect more than one medical condition as well as unknown factors.
- * Pain medicine specialists' use a broad-based approach to treat all pain disorders, ranging from pain as a symptom of disease (eudynia) to pain as the primary disease (maldynia).
- * Effective prevention includes eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep and managing stress.
- * Complimentary therapies include: massage, meditation, professional counseling, relaxation therapy, acupuncture, biofeedback, behavior modification, medications and exercise.

Sources: American Academy of Pain Management, National Institute of Neurological Disorders & Stroke and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.