

Chronic Non-Cancer Pain Management Program

It is very difficult when you suffer from chronic pain. The CNCP program is designed to help you manage the pain and to lessen the side effects of your medication.

What is Chronic Non-Cancer Pain or CNCP?

CNCP is defined as pain that lasts for longer than 6 months, or beyond the usual healing time for the disease or injury.

This may include:

- neuropathic pain (pain from nerve damage)
- osteoarthritis (affecting the cartilage in the joints)
- rheumatoid arthritis (inflammation of the lining of the joints)
- fibromyalgia (widespread pain in muscles, tendons and/or ligaments)
- back and musculoskeletal pain

Acute pain is a natural protective mechanism. It alerts the brain to a problem.

Chronic pain is different. It rarely provides any helpful function and can be disabling, preventing you from working or enjoying life. It is estimated that between 10% and 30% of Canadians suffer from chronic pain.

The cause of chronic pain may be from an injury or nerve damage or a chronic disease. For some people, no cause can be determined. However that does not mean that pain does not exist.

Chronic pain affects your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It can disrupt sleep or appetite and reduce your energy. You may not be able to complete your usual daily activities or to work at your usual pace. Chronic pain is the most common cause of long-term disability.

As well, chronic pain may make it more difficult to concentrate or remember things. People with chronic pain may feel irritable, angry, frustrated, anxious and/or depressed. This can put a strain on your personal relationships.

While there may not be a simple cure for chronic pain, this program may help you manage it.

Who is eligible for the program?

Rostered patients may be referred by their doctor or nurse practitioner because of:

- chronic non-cancer pain, lasting over 6 months
- which is not managed by non-opioid pain medications
- and therefore requires opioids (narcotics)

What are opioids (narcotics)?

Opioids are a class of analgesics (pain killers). Opioids decrease the brain's awareness of pain by stopping pain messages from reaching the brain. A person is less able to perceive the pain. Opioids are available only through prescription and must be carefully monitored.

Side effects of opioids may include:

- drowsiness
- nausea, vomiting
- constipation
- fatigue
- itching
- sweating
- mental clouding

These side effects are usually most noticeable when first starting a medication, or with dose increases. Through this program, side effects will be monitored.

Addiction is rare when the drug is used correctly. A few simple guidelines to remember when using opioids:

- take only the prescribed dosage
- fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy
- refrain from using other mood modifying substances (alcohol, tranquilizers, sleeping pills or illicit drugs)
- do not operate machinery or a vehicle if you are having side effects from your medication
- store the medication securely

How does the program work?

After your doctor or nurse practitioner refers you to the program, a program nurse will call to introduce the program and book for your first visit. At your first visit, the program nurse will assess your current level of pain and explain the risks, benefits and purpose of opioid therapy. A blood test may be taken to check your liver functions if this has not been done recently.

Follow-up visits with your doctor and the program nurse will be usually every 3 - 6 months,

- to review how well the medication is working and to assess your pain
- to monitor the side effects
- if necessary refer you to additional/complementary or alternative therapies

These therapies may include:

- referrals within our health team: social work
- referrals to pain specialists
- referrals to alternative therapies, exercise, meditation, yoga

Need more information?

Canadian Pain Coalition - www.canadianpaincoalition.ca

The Arthritis Society - www.arthritis.ca

Canadian Institute for the Relief of Pain and Disability - www.cirpd.org

Neuropathic Pain information - www.nepknowmore.ca