



5 reasons to see your doctor about your pain

- Living with persistent pain isn't easy
- Your doctor can help you balance your pain, your treatment and any hurdles you encounter in life
- It's important to be aware of any 'red flags' and seek help

It's not easy dealing with persistent pain. Facing uncertainty about how you'll feel each day can be very frustrating. It can make planning your everyday activities, work, social life and family commitments challenging.

So it's not surprising that sometimes pain and emotions can get on top of you. But there are many things you can do and many resources available to help you get back on track.

Here are five reasons you should see your doctor about your persistent pain.

1. You want to take control

If you want to learn more about pain and how to manage it effectively, talk with your doctor about pain management programs. These programs can be found in many areas, and are even available online.

Pain management programs specifically address the range of factors affecting your recovery including:

- physical factors
- any psychological issues including your mood, stress or poor sleep
- social factors including how you manage your activities at home as well as how you can return to safe work.

By attending a pain management program you'll learn from health professionals such as doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses and psychologists. These professionals provide information and advice on how you can best manage your pain with the least side effects to help you increase your activity levels and achieve your goals.

Talk with your doctor about whether a pain management program would be helpful for your situation.

2. You're not coping with your pain

It's important to talk with your doctor if you feel like you're not coping, especially if:

- you're taking more of your medications than your doctor prescribed
- you're mixing your prescribed medications with other drugs, including alcohol
- you're drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- you're having problems sleeping due to pain
- you've been feeling very low for more than a few weeks
- you've been missing days of work because of pain
- you're more worried, frustrated and irritable than usual.

Your doctor understands that living with persistent pain is difficult. They can work with you to find the right pathway that will help you. They can also refer you to other health professionals including specialists in physical and/or mental health.

3. You're struggling at work

If you're not coping with your work responsibilities, or just getting to and from work has become difficult because of your pain, you should discuss this with your doctor. Evidence shows that work is good for you. So even though you may be in pain, doing what you can at work will be of benefit to your overall health and wellbeing.

It may be possible for adjustments to be made to your work to help you cope. Your doctor is able to recruit other healthcare professionals, such as specially trained physiotherapists, occupational therapists and specialist doctors (occupational physicians) to assist you to remain at work.

Check out the list of websites and contacts in the *More to Explore* section for support services that can help you stay at work.

4. You've decided to stop taking your regular medication for pain

It's important that you talk with your doctor openly if you're thinking of stopping any medications for pain, mood and muscle spasm. Some medications need to be reduced gradually to avoid potential unpleasant side effects. Your doctor will advise you on this.

5. You've noticed significant changes to your symptoms

It's important to be aware of other health changes that may occur. They can be present for a variety of reasons, many of which will be unrelated to your pain.

However if you've been experiencing any of the following symptoms talk with your doctor:

- sudden increase in the intensity of your pain
- sudden loss of muscle power in your legs or arms
- sudden change in your ability to empty or control your bladder or bowel
- a lack of sensation anywhere in your body
- sudden onset of pins and needles or numbness in either hands or feet
- sudden onset of poor balance or a lack of coordination
- unexplained and ongoing loss of weight
- sweats at night time
- moderate or severe pain at night or at rest
- onset of new pain in your abdomen, chest or head which does not go away.

These 'red flags' are clues for your doctor that something has changed. For people who've experienced: malignant cancer, long-term steroid use (not asthma puffers), have recently had a severe infection or experienced some physical trauma that could have resulted in a fracture, changes in pain and other signs and symptoms should be treated with caution and investigated further.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Physiotherapist
- Exercise physiologist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Musculoskeletal Australia
www.msk.org.au
MSK Help Line: 1800 263 265

How we can help

Call our MSK Help Line and speak to our nurses. Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@msk.org.au.

We can help you find out more about:

- arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions
- ways to live well with these conditions
- managing your pain
- upcoming webinars, seminars and other events.

More to explore

- Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- beyondblue www.beyondblue.org.au
- Support Service - 1300 224 636
- Choosing Wisely Australia
www.choosingwisely.org.au
- Employment Assistance Fund
www.jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf
- Job in Jeopardy Assistance
www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/job-jeopardy-assistance
- Lifeline
Crisis Support - 13 11 14
- National Prescribing Service www.nps.org.au
- Medicine Line - 1300 633 424
- Pain Australia www.painaustralia.org.au
- painHEALTH <http://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au>
- TAC www.tac.vic.gov.au
- WorkSafe www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

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