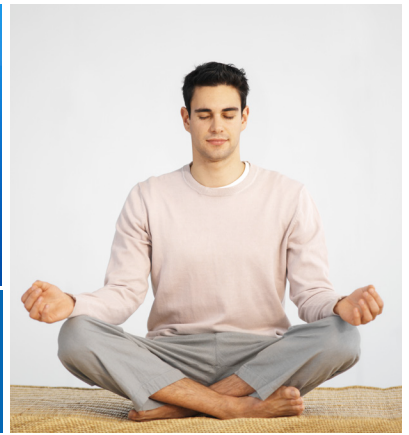


Other ways of managing pain



Medications are not the only way to treat pain. There are other methods that might help you.

What is pain?

When a part of the body has a problem (injury, illness, etc.), it can send a pain signal to the brain. This is an unpleasant sensory experience, which often causes difficult emotions.

How can we manage pain?

Pain is not a simple thing. It is:

- Felt to varying degrees: the strength of the signal sent to the brain varies from person to person.
- Tolerated to varying degrees: for a signal of the same strength, the pain will be easier or more difficult to bear depending on the person.

As well, how we perceive pain can change depending on, for example, our stress levels, our emotions, and our beliefs.



How can we manage pain?

Medications can block, completely or partially, the pain signal going to the brain. They're generally effective. But medications are not the only method available.

In fact, we can also act on how we perceive pain. For example, we can do activities that work on our body or our emotions, or that change our thinking.



Why use other methods than medication?

These methods have different benefits. They can help you to:

- Feel better overall.
- Take fewer medications. Some medications (such as opioids) can have serious side effects.
- Tolerate pain better and feel more in control.

What are the other possible methods?

There are several, all of them effective. Often, they're low-cost or free. As well, they can easily be done at home in a short time.

Here's a list of different methods that can have a positive effect on your pain:

- TENS, or transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, blocks pain signals.
- Getting a massage, or doing self-massage, can promote well-being and relaxation. It can also help reduce pain signals transmitted by the body.



- Good posture can reduce pain. Physiotherapists can show you the right positions to take.
- An occupational therapist or physiotherapist can give you advice or exercises tailored to your situation.
- Applying heat or cold to a painful area can reduce the sensation of pain. Cold, in particular, helps reduce swelling.
- Acupuncture can be used to manage pain, but can also act on other related symptoms, such as fatigue and stress.
- A healthy diet can reduce inflammation and sensitivity to pain.
- Muscle relaxation and abdominal breathing help reduce stress. See the health sheet [*Relaxation for better stress management*](#).



- Yoga and mental imagery can reduce stress and so change the way we perceive pain.
- Hypnosis or self-hypnosis can be used to enter a different state of consciousness and detach ourselves from pain.
- “Mindfulness” is an approach for observing what your body and mind are experiencing (including emotions and pain) without judgment. Trying to escape or fight these sensations takes a lot of energy. Mindfulness helps calm this struggle. This leaves you with more energy for yourself. Meditation is one way to practice mindfulness.
- An activity that interests you (activities of daily living, hobbies, arts, spending time with loved ones or a pet, etc.) can give you a break from the pain. It's good for your morale and helps you develop some abilities, such as better tolerance for physical effort. This allows you to gradually regain your self-confidence.



- Any simple activity where you have to concentrate also allows you to live in the present moment and helps reduce stress. For example, you can do colouring, knitting, puzzles, or video games.
- Listening to music reduces tension and painful sensations.

Several of these methods help the body produce more relaxation hormones (endorphins) and fewer stress hormones (cortisol). They also have beneficial effects on the nervous system, which is responsible for pain management.

How can I access these methods?

The CHUM Pain Management Center organizes certain activities for CHUM patients. Ask your healthcare team for more information.

See also the resources listed on this page.



Questions



Resource people and contacts



RESSOURCES UTILES

My pain management:
gerermadouleur.ca

Association québécoise de la douleur chronique:
douleurquebec.ca

Cahier Biblio-Santé sur la douleur chronique :
bibliosante.ca
See the section Cahiers [French only]

Fédération québécoise des massothérapeutes agréés :
fqm.qc.ca

Association des acupuncteurs du Québec :
acupuncture-quebec.com [French only]

Relaxation and mindfulness applications :
[Petit BamBou](#), [Calm](#), [RespiRelax+](#)
([Android](#) et [Apple](#)).

Book : *Libérez-vous de la douleur par la méditation et l'ACT*, de Frédérick Dionne.
[French only]

Ordre des psychologues du Québec :
ordrepsy.qc.ca

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online.
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca



Use this chart to manage your pain level.
You can print it from:

chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante/pain-level

Use this chart to:

- keep track of your pain level (from 0 to 10)
- keep track of what's done to relieve your pain
- note the effects on your pain



Pain management

[illegible]

Pain level



no pain 0 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9 10 worst pain you can imagine

You want to keep your pain level at **4** or lower.
Unrelieved pain will be harder to control.