

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

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Managing pain and chronic pain

Everyone has experienced pain at some point. There are two main types- acute pain, which is short-term pain, and chronic pain, which lasts longer. Both types of pain can be challenging, but there's support available and many strategies which can be used to help manage pain and increase your ability to do your day-to-day activities.

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What is pain?

We have all experienced [pain](#) before, and know that it is an unpleasant feeling. Receptors from nerves called nociceptors detect tissue damage and then relay that information to the brain, which we feel as pain. Our body uses pain to keep us safe and to try to stop us doing things that might damage our body- for instance, stopping someone from walking on a broken leg. Sometimes, chronic pain can occur when the body's protective systems become too protective, and keep causing pain even after a short-term injury might have healed.

The two [main types of pain](#) are acute pain and chronic pain. Acute pain is pain that lasts no more than three to six months. Examples of things which can cause acute pain include broken bones, burns or cuts, period pain, or surgery.

Chronic pain is pain that lasts longer than 3-6 months, and can be caused by conditions such as migraine, arthritis, back pain, cancer, nerve pain, and fibromyalgia.

Stress from chronic pain can have further impacts on the body, such as tense muscles, fatigue, decreased ability to move around, difficulty sleeping, and appetite changes. It can also impact your mood and mental health, as well as causing a fear of re-injury, which can cause people to avoid moving around or doing things because they're worried it will make things worse.

Strategies for managing pain

There are lots of strategies available to help manage pain, whether it is short-term or long term. You may find that one strategy alone isn't enough, that it takes some time for your pain to improve, or that these strategies aren't able to completely get rid of your pain, but it's important to know that improvement is possible and with the right support, there's lots of options to try that can help you manage your pain and be able to do the things you want and need to do.

- **Talk to your general practitioner (GP)** about developing a pain management plan for managing your chronic pain. You might also discuss the use of pain medicines with your GP.

[Certain therapies](#) may help you manage chronic pain, including:

- **Psychological treatment/Cognitive-Behavioral therapy (CBT):** How we experience pain is impacted by all different parts of our life. Mood, such as lots of anxiety about pain, and mindset, such as feeling like you don't have any control over your pain, can make it harder to cope with and manage pain. Psychological treatment can help by reducing stress which can make pain worse, help identify helpful ways to manage pain through the things you do each day and help support your mental health as pain can result in negative impacts on mental health.

- **Physical therapy:** When you experience pain, it can be natural to avoid doing things like standing, bending or moving around in case it makes your pain worse. However, being active and getting moving can be a really important part of helping your body heal and reducing pain. Physical therapy can help teach you ways to move your body safely and increase your strength and ability to function.
- **Occupational therapy:** Occupational therapy teaches you how to do everyday tasks differently to lessen pain or avoid injury.

Many non-medicine treatments are available to help you [manage your pain](#). A combination of treatments and therapies is often more effective than just one.

Self-talk: Change how you think about your pain and yourself. For example, change "Pain prevents me from keeping house the way I used to so I'm a failure" to "No one will die if the house isn't perfect. I can get a lot done by breaking down tasks into baby steps."

Activity pacing: Try breaking down the tasks you need to do. For instance, if you find vacuuming the house in one go is too painful and makes it hard to do things afterwards due to the pain, think about vacuuming one room each day instead. It can be helpful to keep a pain diary to help identify which things make your pain worse or better so that you can plan how best to plan your activities.

Mindfulness meditation: Mindfulness is something which has been found by research to help reduce pain, as well as being helpful for other impacts of pain such as depression, coping ability, quality of life and sleep quality. [This page](#) from the Western Australian painHEALTH program has lots of information about how mindfulness is helpful for pain and has some mindfulness exercises to try.

Exercise: Regular exercise can diminish pain in the long term by improving muscle tone, strength, and flexibility.

Get regular sleep: Pain can cause fatigue, so making sure you're well rested is important. If you find pain is making it difficult to sleep, you can try techniques like keeping a regular sleep and wake up time, avoiding caffeine and screens before bed, and talking to your GP about the timing of any pain medications you take to help you have the best chance of getting a good night's sleep.

Stay connected: You can boost your mood and decrease stress by participating in activities you enjoy and socializing with friends. Chronic pain may make it challenging to perform certain tasks. But isolating yourself can give you a more negative outlook on your condition and increase your pain sensitivity. Spending time with friends and family, in-person or via video chat can decrease focus on the pain.

Pain and my studies

If you're experiencing pain at university, there's lots of support available. The [university support](#) section below provides details of who you can contact to ask for help. Students experiencing temporary injury such as a broken limb, or disability or chronic illness which causes pain can access accommodations through the Disability Service. The Counselling Service can help provide counselling to help provide support to manage the experience of pain.

Pain can cause increased fatigue and make it harder to focus and remember, however, there's different strategies you can use to help manage your studies and stay on top of the things you need to get done.

Keep organised: Try using lists to help organise things you need to do and to help you spread your tasks out across the day so that you're able to rest when you need to and reduce stress by not needing to get everything done last-minute. You might find an online calendar like [Google Calendar](#) or one of the [planners](#) designed around the WSU calendar helpful. To-do apps like [Microsoft To Do](#) or [Todoist](#) can also be helpful for keeping on top of when things are due.

Plan your semester: Think about what will make studies easier for you, and try to plan your semester as best you can around this. Your course advisor can help think through your options- see WSU help and resources below for more information about this.

Some things to consider include:

- If available, whether to enrol in on-campus classes or online classes
- Whether to attend lectures in person or watch lectures online from home
- Whether to study full time or whether to consider a reduced study load
- When to schedule classes- you may find it easier to try to spread your tutorials across the week or to try to keep them to a few days, or perhaps to have them at a certain time of day.

University support

If you would like to access some support, the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exams**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community support

- [Lifeline](#)- (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**
Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).
- [Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#)- Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.
- To understand more and develop a pain management program, visit your [general practitioner](#) who can provide support and discuss referral to a pain clinic.
- Discuss your pain on the [Pain Link helpline](#) (1300 340 357) which is staffed by volunteers with personal experience of chronic pain.
- [Beyondblue](#) can be contacted by telephone on 1300 22 4636 or you can try their [online chat](#).

Resources

- [Websites](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)

- [Apps](#)

Websites

The [Pain Management Network](#) website is designed to help you get a better understanding of your pain and has lots of stories from people about how they manage their pain, including a section for young people. They have [resources](#) specifically for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as resources translated into a [number of languages](#).

[Chronic Pain Australia](#) provides a platform for Australians in pain to be connected, validated, and empowered. It also provides webinars and factsheets about a variety of topics related to pain.

[MindSpot](#)- Free, online, personalised mental health care that's backed by evidence and designed to support people experiencing conditions including chronic pain. MindSpot provides access to qualified therapists for assessment and treatment and is available to all Australian adults who are eligible for Medicare.

Podcasts

“075 SP5 5 Tips to Cope with Chronic Pain”

In this episode, Psychologist Dr. Ellen Hendriksen discusses where chronic pain can occur and how it can affect your everyday life, including your mental health.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/18jiOBXIpaHwo6IC1ArmMa?si=5-sMJkVRT26RmthZWQV-tA&nd=1>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/075-sp-5-tips-to-cope-with-chronic-pain/id803978236?i=1000457189447>

“Why chronic pain is like a bilby in a bathtub”

In this podcast by ABC Conversations, clinical pain neuroscientist Dr. Tasha Stanton explains her studies into the power of the mind when it comes to coping with injury and illness.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5SmoPwuVHEX1RL26lxLQyn?si=xuafncECRwKMq7xkKLDekA&nd=1>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/why-chronic-pain-is-like-a-bilby-in-a-bathtub/id94688506?i=1000556936052>

Videos

[PsychHub- Managing chronic pain](#)

[TED-Ed- How does your brain respond to pain?](#)

Apps

- [Pathways Pain relief](#) (\$14.99 per month or \$69.99 per year) – it provides a mind-body pain therapy program, including mediation and mindfulness area, physical therapy area, pain and wellbeing tracking.
- [Smiling mind](#): A free, evidence-based mindfulness and meditation app designed to help you fit mindfulness activities into your day. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing.
- [MedicineWise](#): A free medication and healthcare management app designed for people who take regular medications and those who care for them. It allows you to create medicine and other health reminders, record important health information, and store details of healthcare professionals.

Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional.

Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).

References

[ACI Pain Management Network](#)

[Chronic Pain Australia](#)

[Health Direct – Options for Managing Chronic Pain](#)

[Cleveland Clinic – Acute vs Chronic Pain](#)

