



Catholic Healthcare West

Ask the Expert

Q: Is chronic pain syndrome a real medical condition? If so, how is it treated?

A: Chronic pain syndrome (CPS) is often defined as any pain that lasts longer than six months or pain that extends beyond the expected period of healing. It refers to persistent pain that usually has no identifiable source and can be very challenging for healthcare providers to manage.

It is also important to recognize that stress is oftentimes one of the leading amplifiers of CPS, and stress alone often will cause CPS to flare up in a worsened manner. Post traumatic stress as well as other types of physical, emotional or mental stress all contribute to CPS in that the sense of pain will increase as a result of the actual severity of the level of stress. Soon the person becomes the victim of a vicious circle in which total preoccupation with pain leads to irritability and depression. The sufferer cannot sleep at night and the next day's weariness compounds the problem, leading to more irritability, depression, and pain. This is often called the "terrible triad" of suffering, sleeplessness, and sadness, a condition that is as hard on the family as it is on the victim.

For individuals with CPS, treatment should focus on pain management rather than cure. The goals should be clearly defined and articulated, such as increasing functional capacity and decreasing dependencies on medication. Effectively managing CPS is based on rehabilitation, behavior modification and therapy. Therapeutic options for chronic pain can include physical therapy, occupational therapy, interventional treatments, psychological therapy, biofeedback, cognitive behavioral therapy, or medication including analgesics, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

I recommend close contact with a primary care doctor or a pain management specialist who can help facilitate treatment. Regimens will vary for everyone, but finding the right doctor and trying multiple treatment options will increase your chance for stabilizing your pain and improving your daily life.



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