

It is well known and accepted that your state of mind can have a significant impact on how you perceive and manage your pain. There are many non-medication strategies that can be used to gain some control over how you are affected by pain. Treating associated problems such as depression, anxiety, or insomnia, which frequently accompany pain, can also help reduce pain levels.

Recognizing the signs of depression is not always easy. If you are experiencing feelings of sadness, emotional ups and downs, have lost interest in social or other (previously) fun activities, have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, have lost your appetite or energy, have a sense of hopelessness, you feel agitated or anxious, then please do not hesitate to discuss these symptoms with your doctor. These may be signs of depression or another medical condition.

Anxiety, the frequent feeling of nervousness, fear, or feeling uptight, can be present with or worsen in response to pain. It, in turn, can make your experience of pain tougher to cope with. Also, a lack of restful sleep can have a negative effect on your ability to manage pain. If you are experiencing significant difficulty sleeping, whether it is from pain, worry, or other reasons, you should bring this to the attention of your doctor.

There are many ways to deal with pain or associated problems with mood, anxiety, or sleep. Aerobic (cardio) exercise can be very helpful because it causes the release of chemicals in the brain that are helpful for all of these problems. This makes exercise an ideal form of pain and stress management. Your goal should be to gradually increase the amount of weekly exercise to 2 ½ total hours of moderate to vigorous exercise. Choose a form of exercise that you can tolerate and enjoy, and consider mixing types. Biking, walking, swimming or pool walking, endurance strength training, yoga, Tai Chi, or Pilates are good examples. Seek guidance on the safety or appropriateness of these exercises for you, specifically, from your doctor or physical therapist.

Relaxation training can be done with the help of instructional recordings, biofeedback specialists, or pain psychologists. This can be an excellent way to control pain or anxiety, and to promote sleep.

Good sleep “hygiene” includes the avoidance of television or computer work in bed before sleep, stopping caffeine at or before lunch, and having a notepad by your bedside to write down any recurring thoughts or ideas so that you can “let them go”.

These and other useful ideas for managing your pain can be learned through the help of a pain psychologist, or by working with other specialists. Your doctor can help counsel you, or direct you to the approach or specialist that is right for you. Medications may occasionally be used to treat pain, depression, anxiety, or sleep disorders, as well.